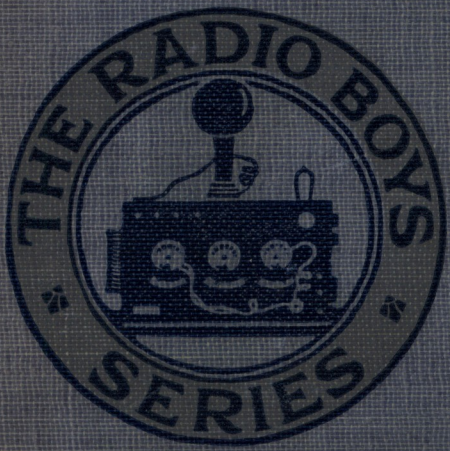
THE RADIO BOYS IN GOLD VALLEY



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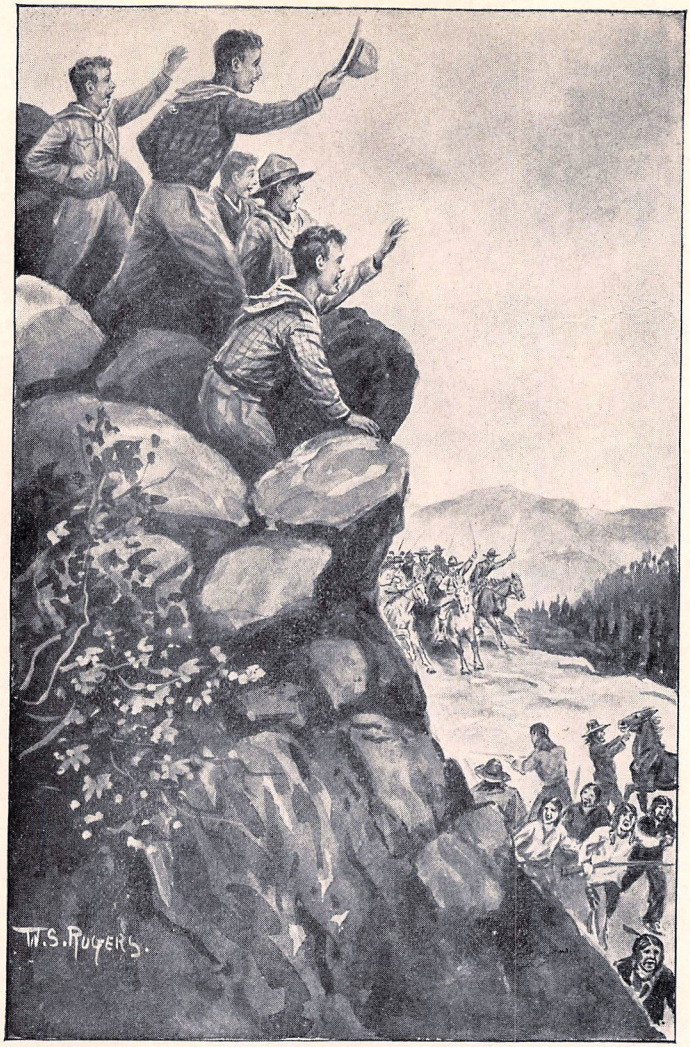
THE RADIO BOYS IN GOLD VALLEY



A WILD HURRAH BURST FROM THE RADIO BOYS AS THE TROOPS SWUNG AROUND THE CURVE.

The Radio Boys in Gold Valley. *Frontispiece* (*Page* 214)

THE RADIO BOYS SERIES
(Trademark Registered)

THE RADIO BOYS IN GOLD VALLEY

OR

THE MYSTERY OF THE DESERTED MINING CAMP

BY

ALLEN CHAPMAN

AUTHOR OF

THE RADIO BOYS' FIRST WIRELESS
THE RADIO BOYS ON SIGNAL ISLAND
RALPH OF THE ROUNDHOUSE, ETC.

WITH FOREWORD BY

JACK BINNS

ILLUSTRATED BY

WALTER S. ROGERS

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BY ALLEN CHAPMAN

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RALPH ON THE MOUNTAIN DIVISION
Or Fighting Both Flames and Flood

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The Radio Boys in Gold Valley

FOREWORD

By Jack Binns

Here is a tale of adventure that will thrill the heart of any boy and make him wish he were one of its heroes. Once again the resourceful lads who have endeared themselves as "The Radio Boys" are able to utilize their pet hobby in a desperate enterprise and win out against great odds. The heroes of this book are the type of boyhood that has done so much to develop the wonderful potentialities of radio as a means of communication; entertainment; and, most important of all, life-saving.

The wholesome character of The Radio Boys can be attibuted to their devoted interest in a very useful and instructive hobby. Their hands and minds, fully occupied with its fascinating possibilities, have been developed to high degree, endowing them with a resourcefulness and courage which every healthy minded youth desires to attain.

In this story The Radio Boys have won their spurs and more than maintained the splendid character which they established for themselves in

the previous books of the series. In reading it I became a boy again and lived with them through every thrilling moment of their stirring adventures, and I feel sure that every other boy within the reading age, whether he be eight or eighty, will do the same.

In connection with this tale of a gold mine, it is interesting to point out that radio itself is now being used for the purpose of locating valuable metallic ores. This new adaptation of the greatest of modern wonders takes advantage of a scientific fact, and thus is absolutely positive in its ability to locate nature's metallic riches buried deep within the Earth. With its aid there is no longer any necessity for the arduous tasks of the old time prospector, and his frequent heartbreaking disappointments. Science has again conquered Chance.

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THE RADIO BOYS IN GOLD VALLEY

CHAPTER I

A TERRIBLE MOMENT

"HURRAH for the West! Hurrah for a life in the saddle!" cried Bob Layton, as he broke into the room where his friends, Joe Atwood, Herb Fennington, and Jimmy Plummer were hard at work on a radio set.

The three boys looked up in surprise at the sudden entrance.

"I knew it. I knew it would come to this," murmured Joe, shaking his head sadly. "Too many movies!"

"They're sure to play the mischief with a weak intellect," declared Herb.

"And he was such a nice fellow before his mind was unhinged," mourned Jimmy, affecting to wipe away a tear.

"Quit your kidding, you boobs," commanded Bob, as he waved a letter at them. "I'm crazy,

am I? Yes, crazy as a fox! Read this letter," and he tossed it over to his chums.

They all made a dive for it, but Joe was the quickest and nabbed it.

"From Brandon Harvey!" he exclaimed, as he glanced first of all at the signature.

"Brandon Harvey!" echoed Herb and Jimmy, and it was evident from the note of interest in their tones that the writer was a prime favorite with them.

"Nobody else," affirmed Bob. "But read the letter."

Joe read it aloud while the others listened breathlessly, and when they gathered the full purport they let out a whoop that would have done credit to a bunch of Indians.

"It's too good to be true!" exclaimed Bob, as he relieved his exuberant spirits by a jig about the room. "Think of the old boy wanting us to go West with him! Out in the Rockies! Out on the plains! Camping in the open! Riding on broncos! Say, fellows, is this real or am I only dreaming?"

"It's real, all right," declared Joe, tapping the letter. "Gee, won't that be great? We'll have the time of our lives."

"Indians! Buffaloes!" murmured Jimmy happily.

"Not much of those, I guess," rejoined Bob.

"Most of the Indians have faded out of the picture and nearly all the buffaloes are gone. But if you need excitement, perhaps we can scrape up some grizzlies or rattlesnakes to keep your blood moving."

"His feet moving, you mean," gibed Herb. "Jimmy'd travel so fast you couldn't see him for the dust if bears or snakes turned up."

"Who wouldn't?" retorted Jimmy. "I'll bet you'd do a hundred yards in ten seconds flat."

"Nine," admitted Herb. "But what's this the old boy says about a gold mine? Looks as though he'd struck it rich."

"He doesn't seem any too sure of that," replied Bob, referring to the letter. "The property was left to him by some relative of his, an old gold miner, and he's going out to look it over. It may be a frost or it may be a fortune. He'll know better after he gets there. But, anyway, he wants us to go along, and that's all that matters just now."

"Maybe we're counting our chickens before they're hatched," remarked Jimmy, struck by a second and sober thought. "How do we know our folks will let us go?"

"Why shouldn't they?" countered Joe. "Here it is just the beginning of vacation and we've all been wondering where we'd spend it. This

thing has come along just in the nick of time. What could be sweeter?"

"Besides, all our people know Brandon Harvey and like him," added Bob. "They know he's as safe as a church. I don't think they'll have the least objection to our going with him."

"I'm going to tackle my folks this very night!" declared Joe. "And unless my tongue gets paralyzed, I'll put it over. They'll give in just to keep me quiet."

"We've just got to put it across!" asserted Herb. "It wouldn't be any fun at all, if one of us were left out."

"That's right," agreed Bob. "We've been together in all our other trips, and we've got to be together in this one."

"Mighty white in the old boy to ask us," said Joe. "Let's see. Were is the place? Gold Valley! What state is that in?"

"Search me," remarked Jimmy, who was rather hazy on matters of geography.

"Somewhere out in Montana or Nevada, I reckon," surmised Herb. "Gee, what a long trip, fellows! We've never been so far from home before."

"Almost all the way across the continent," chuckled Bob. "That's seeing America first with a vengeance."

"Our folks will have to let us go just for the education," remarked Jimmy hopefully.

"First time in Jimmy's life that he ever got worked up on the matter of education," grinned Herb.

"Doughnuts usually hit him harder," laughed Joe, for Jimmy's passion for those dainties was a standing joke among his friends.

"That reminds me—" said Jimmy, as he thrust his hand into the pocket of his jacket.

A look of consternation stole over his face as he felt about in vain.

"Reminds you of what?" asked Herb, with a wink at Bob and Joe.

"Of something that isn't here," snapped Jimmy, as he viewed his mates with suspicion. "I had two doughnuts in this pocket when I came into this joint. Where are they?"

"How do I know?" asked Herb, with the innocent expression of a cherub.

"Somebody swiped them," declared Jimmy indignantly.

"Perhaps you've eaten them yourself absent-mindedly," suggested Joe. "You eat so many that it's hard for you to keep count, you know."

"I'm not so absent-minded as all that," protested Jimmy, his glance sweeping the group. "What are those crumbs on the lapel of your coat, Herb Fennington?"

Herb hastily brushed his coat.

"Ha!" cried Jimmy triumphantly. "That gives you away. There weren't any crumbs there at all. It was a guilty conscience that made you do that."

"Herb did you a favor, anyway," remarked Bob. "He knew that you were eating more than were good for your health. And your health is very precious to Herb, Jimmy."

"Sure thing," agreed Herb. "I'd do more than that for a friend any time."

"And now that we're all happy again," said Bob—here Jimmy glared at him—"let's see what's the matter with this radio set. It only needs the touch of the master—"

"He hates himself, doesn't he?" gibed Herb.

"He's the fellow that put the 'mar' in Marconi," added Joe.

"Not so, little ones," said Bob soothingly. "I don't mar anything. Ah, just as I thought! That connection wasn't made securely," and with a deft touch he rectified the oversight.

"By the way," put in Joe, as a thought struck him, "we'll miss our radio when we go on this trip."

"Miss nothing!" snorted Bob. "We'll take a set along, maybe two. Catch me going along without it."

"We'll have to travel light, you know," inter-

polated Herb. "Perhaps Hr. Harvey will object."

"Not on your life!" cried Jimmy. "He's a radio fan himself. He thinks, eats and dreams radio. Likely enough he'll take along a set of his own. No knowing when it may come in handy out there in the mountains."

"That's a safe bet," agreed Bob. "But that can be settled later. The thing for us to do is to get our folks to consent. And we want to do it pronto, for Harvey's going to start in a week, and it will take a lot of hustling to get ready in time."

There was a lot of discussion in the households of the four boys that night. It was a long trip that Brandon Harvey had proposed and possibly a dangerous one, and there was a good deal of argument pro and con, during which the boys summed up all the eloquence of which they were capable.

Two factors finally won the consent of the parents of all four. One was that the boys had repeatedly demonstrated that they were fully able to take care of themselves under almost all circumstances. The other was the confidence that the parents felt in the sponsor of the trip.

Brandon Harvey had been the wireless operator in charge of the Ocean Point station during a summer that the boys had spent there. He was a

genial young fellow of the finest character and a thorough master of his profession. He had helped the boys immensely in perfecting their knowledge of radio, and they in turn had been of service to him when he had been blackjacked and robbed by an escaped convict. The friendship thus begun had been cemented later on, and Brandon Harvey had been a welcome visitor at their homes. There was no one with whom the parents would have been more willing to trust their boys.

So it was finally decided that the boys could go to Gold Valley, and they were in the seventh heaven of delight. Then ensued an interchange of letters and telegrams with Harvey in which all the details of the trip were arranged.

Owing to the pressure of business, Harvey could not come directly to the boys' home town, Clintonia, and it was arranged that they should meet him at a railway junction about thirty miles away. Mr. Layton offered to take the boys over in his automobile, which was capacious enough to carry their suitcases also, their trunks having been sent on by train.

About their radio equipment there had been considerable discussion. It was finally planned to take two sets, those belonging to Bob and Joe, both of which were strictly up to date and represented the last word in radio, though Joe was

leaving a larger set behind. Bob's was a sending set, Joe's a receiving.

The proposition to send the radio sets ahead as baggage was negatived by the owners, who were afraid of some damage being done to their precious possessions by careless handling. They wanted them always beneath their eyes, and as they were very compact, it was comparatively easy to take the sets along with them.

It was with exceeding care that they placed the sets in the automobile on the morning they were to start. Each had been carefully boxed.

"Think of sitting on some mountain top and listening to the programs of Denver or Chicago," remarked Joe ecstatically.

"Why stop at Chicago," put in Bob. "We can get New York just as clearly."

"That's right," agreed Herb. "There'll be no trouble about receiving from almost anywhere. But how about the sending? Where shall we get the juice?"

The boys looked at each other rather blankly. That essential fact had not occurred to them before.

The day had dawned bright and beautiful and the boys were in the highest possible spirits. As Jimmy phrased it, they were "sitting on top of the world."

To be sure, they were sobered somewhat when

the time came for parting and they noted the tears in their mothers' eyes and the huskiness in their fathers' voices. Joe's sister Rose was equally affected and Amy, Herb's sister, could hardly reconcile herself to letting him go. Agnes, Herb's other sister, was herself away from home. Herb's younger brothers, Tommy and Derry, were frankly envious, and Herb, as a prospective traveler, gained a new importance in their eyes.

At last the final farewells were spoken and the boys with a parting wave of their hands were off on the journey that would not end until they reached the Rockies.

"That suitcase of yours is surely a fat one, Jimmy," remarked Joe, as he tried to find room for his legs on one side of it.

"Like owner, like suitcase," gibed Herb, with a twinkle in his eye.

"I had to pile a lot of things into it just at the last moment," explained Jimmy, disdaining to retort.

"And I know just what those things are," affirmed Bob. "Doughnuts—and then some more doughnuts."

Mr. Layton's car was a powerful one and it purred along the road with a hum that was music in the ears of the boys.

"I understand that Mr. Harvey is coming by

bus from Greenfield to the junction," remarked Mr. Layton.

"That's the plan," returned Bob. "And I hope he won't be late."

They were within a quarter of a mile of the junction when they caught sight of an auto bus coming along a road nearly at right angles to that which they were pursuing.

"I'll bet that's the bus Mr. Harvey is on!" exclaimed Bob. "Step on the gas, Dad, and we'll beat it to the station."

Mr. Layton smiled, and the car darted forward with increased speed.

The bus was making good time on the road that ran alongside a little river.

A cry of alarm came from Joe.

"Look at the way that freight truck is tearing down the hill!" he shouted, pointing to a huge vehicle on a steep incline of a road that crossed the one on which the bus was running. "There must be something the matter with the brakes. Oh!" and his voice rose to a yell of terror. "It'll hit the bus! It'll hit the bus!"

The next moment the calamity happened.

The freight truck struck the auto bus with terrific force and drove it over the bank into the river!

CHAPTER II

TO THE RESCUE

THERE was a chorus of screams from the people in the bus—screams of mortal terror—as the vehicle went tumbling end over end into the water below.

And to these screams were added the shouts of the Radio Boys as, with faces pale as ashes, they urged Mr. Layton incoherently to hurry.

He, on his part, needed no urging, and the machine fairly flew until it came to the spot where the accident had occurred.

The boys jumped out and with Mr. Layton ran to the bank.

The bus—or the shattered remnants of what had been the bus—was resting partly on the bottom of the stream and partly on the muddy bank on the right.

Some of the passengers were struggling in the water, while others had crawled out of the upper end and were helping some of their companions

who were in that part which was under the surface.

In the twinkling of an eye Mr. Layton and the boys had clambered down the embankment and were working like mad.

"There's Mr. Harvey!" shouted Bob, as he caught sight of a figure in the water some distance out from the shore.

The man was making feeble motions of swimming, but he was evidently dazed. Even as Bob recognized him he gave a gasp and sank beneath the surface.

In a flash Bob had thrown off his coat and dived into the stream.

He was an expert swimmer, and he reached the spot where the man had sunk just as the latter's head came again to the surface.

Grasping him by the collar from the back, Bob towed Brandon Harvey to the muddy bank. There willing hands relieved him of his burden and the man was laid out on the bank, where Jimmy and Herb chafed his wrist and applied first aid.

Leaving them to their task, Bob turned again to the river just in time to help Joe, who was bringing a boy to the shore.

The crash had attracted the attention of others, who came rushing to aid, and in a very few minutes all the passengers had been accounted for.

Luckily, none had been killed or mortally injured, though all were more or less bruised, and all, of course, were suffering from shock. Two doctors had been hastily summoned, and they were busy administering restoratives. The few houses in the vicinity were thrown open, and there the more badly hurt were taken.

Three women had been among the passengers and were more or less hysterical. The younger of the three turned her face toward the boys. Suddenly there was a shout from Herb and the next instant he had his arms about the girl and was hugging her with all his might.

"Agnes!" he cried, as he recognized his sister. "You here? Are you hurt?"

"Only badly scared, I guess," replied Agnes. She had been visiting friends in Greenfield. "I knew you were going on this train, and I came over in the bus to say good-bye. I guess I'm all right. But oh, Herb," she exclaimed suddenly, "I've lost my bankbook and my money, and I had a lot of it!"

"Never mind the money as long as you're not hurt," replied Herb. "I'll help you to one of these houses, and then I'll look around for your bankbook and money. And after that I'm going to get you back to where you are staying just as soon as I can."

"But how about your trip?" asked Agnes

anxiously. "I don't want to interfere with that. And your train must be due now almost any minute."

"I'm afraid the trip's all shot to pieces," replied Herb ruefully. "At any rate, it will have to be put off. Mr. Harvey himself was hurt in the accident, and I don't know yet how badly."

One of the near-by houses hospitably received them, and Agnes was committed to the kindly care of some women while Herb, with a promise of returning soon, hurried back to the scene of the disaster.

He found his chums bending over Brandon Harvey, who had now fully recovered consciousness. He was pale and haggard and had an ugly cut on his head which Bob had just finished binding up with a handkerchief.

"Not a very good beginning for our journey," Mr. Harvey was saying as Herb came up. "I guess it will have to be postponed for a day or two."

"That doesn't matter," replied Bob. "There are plenty of other days and other trains. I'm so glad you came through this alive that nothing else matters."

"I thought it was all up with me when the crash came," went on Brandon Harvey. "I must have got a pretty stiff clout on the head from something, for I don't remember anything up to

the time I found myself here on the bank."

"And you wouldn't be on the bank, if Bob hadn't dived in and brought you to shore," put in Joe.

"So that was the way of it, was it?" replied the radio man with a grateful look at Bob. "I sure am thankful, old boy. It isn't the first time you've done me a service. Oh, by the way," he said suddenly, "there was a crippled boy in the bus with me. Have you seen anything of him?"

"Joe pulled him out," replied Bob. "I don't think he was hurt, outside of the shock and the ducking. He's over there now," pointing to the spot on the bank where the boy in question was receiving some stimulant from one of the doctors.

"Thank goodness!" exclaimed Brandon Harvey fervently. "The poor chap is a sort of protégé of mine. His crippled condition is due to an attack years ago of infantile paralysis. To a great extent he's helpless. I was bringing him with me, intending to stop off at Chicago, and put him in a hospital there where some wonderful cures have been made of cases like his."

"Poor fellow!" murmured Bob sympathetically. "He's had enough to bear without running into this accident."

"He's something of a genius in his way," went on Brandon Harvey. "He's a radio fan like yourselves."

There was a distinct quickening of interest among the boys.

"That hits you hard, doesn't it?" remarked the radio man, with a smile. "He thinks he has a new idea about the making of the microphone and he's working hard to get the idea into shape. If he does, he may make a fortune. Let's go over to him," and he rose unsteadily to his feet.

With Bob and Joe giving him a hand on either side, he made his way to where the boy was lying. The crippled lad had his eyes closed, and his face was as white as chalk.

"Has he been hurt badly, doctor?" asked Brandon Harvey, shocked by the boy's appearance.

The physician looked up.

"Nothing broken and no serious bruises," he answered. "But he was in a weakened condition, and this shock has rather knocked him out. He'll need good care and nursing for the next few days."

"Let me take him home with me," broke in Joe. "My father's a doctor and we have plenty of room in our house. We'll take the best of care of him."

"I guess that's the solution," observed Mr. Layton, who came up in time to hear what Joe proposed. "And you, Mr. Harvey, must make my house your home until you are ready to resume your journey."

"It's awfully good of you," replied the radio man deprecatingly. "But—"

"No 'buts'," interrupted Mr. Layton warmly. "Our home has never had a more welcome guest. My car's right here and we'll carry your young friend to it. Then we'll all pile in and make fast time back to Clintonia."

"I'll have to stay here a while and take care of Agnes," said Herb. "I'll get a rig and take her over to Greenfield. Then I'll get back to town on my lonesome. I've got to hunt up her money, too. She's lost quite a wad of it, twelve hundred dollars she inherited from an aunt after whom she was named. It's around here somewhere, together with her bankbook. Likely enough it's gone for good, but I'm going to make a hack at trying to find it."

The arrangement was agreed to, and leaving Herb at his task, the others took up the crippled lad and bestowed him comfortably in the car.

While they are busy at their mission of mercy it may be well, for the benefit of those who have not read the preceding volumes of this series, to tell who Bob and his chums were and what had been their adventures up to the time this story opens.

Their home town, in which they had been born and brought up, was Clintonia, a thriving community on the banks of the Shagary River, less

than a hundred miles from New York City.

Bob Layton was the only son of Mr. and Mrs. Layton, the former a druggist and chemist who enjoyed the esteem of all the people of the town. Bob, who was tall, muscular and clean-cut, had now reached his sixteenth year. He was courageous by nature, frank in disposition and a natural leader in the sports suitable to his age. With the worth while element of the place he was a general favorite.

His closest friend, Joe Atwood, was the son of one of the leading physicians of the town. He had a sister, Rose, and in this respect was luckier than Bob.

Joe was of fair complexion while Bob was dark. Joe was the more impulsive of the two, and his hair-trigger temper sometimes involved him in scrapes from which Bob's cool judgment and quick thinking helped to rescue him. But he was genial, straightforward and truthful. One might have looked far to find a pair so representative of the best qualities of American youth as these two chums.

Close friends of the two were Jimmy Plummer and Herb Fennington. Jimmy's father was a carpenter and contractor, his mother an amiable matron. Jimmy, more commonly known as "Doughnuts" because of his notorious fondness for that triumph of the culinary art, was fat and

jolly. He shed trouble as a duck sheds water and found life a very enjoyable thing.

Herb's father, by hard work, had built up the largest department store in the town. Herb, likable and good-natured, was fond of springing upon his friends riddles and conundrums and jokes of which he always had a stock on hand. He had two sisters, Amy and Agnes, and two younger brothers, Tommy and Derry.

The friendship that existed between the four boys had become still closer when radio burst upon the world and revealed to them its wonders. They were carried away by their interest in the marvelous science. Every hour they could spare from their studies and their sports was devoted to radio, and this became such an enthralling passion with them that they were commonly referred to by the people of the town as "The Radio Boys."

A large part of their spending money went for the latest books and magazines that dealt with the subject, and every new discovery they came across was put to the test in the incessant effort to perfect their sets.

But even more helpful in a practical way was the advice and assistance they received from Dr. Amory Dale, the pastor of the Old First Church of the town. He was a radio fan of high degree, and was always ready to help the boys when they

came to him for suggestions. He had introduced the use of radio in his own church services and ministered to an invisible audience much larger than that which filled the pews.

The influence the doctor had on the boys of Clintonia was not lessened by the fact that he had been a noted star in football and baseball during his college career. There was nothing stiff or pedantic about him, and he seemed, especially to the four Radio Boys, more like a big brother than a preacher.

Despite the popularity of the Radio Boys, there was a certain element in the town that, partly through envy, partly from downright meanness, was hostile to them.

The ringleader of the crowd with which the Radio Boys sometimes clashed was Buck Looker, an overgrown bully, the son of the richest man in Clintonia. Too much spending money had done him no good, and he had gathered about him as cronies a few as worthless as himself who fawned upon him for what he could give them.

These included, among others, Carl Lutz, a boy of about his own age and size, and Terence Mooney, a younger boy who played the sneak and spy in the low schemes of the gang.

Many a time Buck and his crowd had annoyed the Radio Boys, tried to steal or destroy

their sets, and in other ways had made themselves obnoxious. But Bob Layton and his chums had been too much for them, and the low tricks of the gang had proved boomerangs that brought discomfiture to themselves, including several sound thrashings.

How the Radio Boys took part successfully in a contest for the best homemade radio sets; what obstacles and discouragements they met and overcame; how in the course of their experiments they traced over the radio the machinations of a scoundrel who was trying to cheat an orphan girl out of her property—these and other adventures are narrated in the first volume of this series, entitled: "The Radio Boys' First Wireless."

A little while later, while on a vacation at the seaside, they were involved in a series of momentous events in which their knowledge of radio served them in good stead, as by it they were able to send help to an endangered vessel on which some of their own folks were traveling.

They got right into the heart of radio when they were placed on the broadcasting program of a wireless station. This, too, had its complications, some amusing, others dangerous, and led to a number of unlooked for adventures. But even these latter were eclipsed in excitement when on a trip with the Forest Rangers the boys

were trapped in a woodland fire and barely won in their race with death.

Following this, their vessel was sunk in a collision with another, and they were picked up by a steamer of the Iceberg Patrol, their sojourn on which was replete with thrills and battles with the giant bergs as well as with polar bears.

After their return home they visited an uncle of Bob's in Horseshoe Valley, and while they were there became involved in the disaster caused by a freshet that flooded the valley. Here again their knowledge and use of radio brought help when sorely needed and saved the lives and property of the valley people.

Shortly before this story opens they had gone down to spend a few weeks on a deserted island off the Atlantic Coast. It was deserted only in seeming, however, for it proved to be a resort of desperate smugglers. What perils the boys incurred and how they hunted for a buried treasure are told of in the preceding volume of this series, entitled: "The Radio Boys on Signal Island."

Now to return to the boys as they helped the crippled lad into the automobile and sped toward home.

The return was an abrupt change from the hopes with which they had started out a few hours before, but they were all so thankful at

the escape of Agnes Fennington and of the others from death that everything else seemed insignificant. They were alive, they had youth, and the future spread out before them bright with promise.

Mr. Layton drove fast, but not so fast as he would have driven had he not been anxious to spare any jar to Brandon Harvey and the crippled lad.

The latter had now regained consciousness and lay watching them with big, pathetic eyes. The Radio Boys noted that he appeared to be of about the same age as themselves, and their hearts ached as they noted his crippled limbs, in such sad contrast to their own abounding vigor and their sturdy muscles. They saw that his face was keenly intelligent, and there was patience and goodness radiating from him that made them like him at once.

"Feel better, Jesse?" asked Brandon Harvey as he leaned gently toward the lad.

"Yes," replied Jesse Farmer, trying to summon up a smile. "And I've heard enough of your talk to understand how it is I came to be here. It was awfully good of you to pull me out of the water," he added, turning to Joe. "Though, after all," he put in somewhat drearily as an after thought, "I don't know that such a wreck as I am was worth saving."

"Now cut that out, Jesse, old boy," commanded Brandon Harvey not unkindly. "I shouldn't wonder if you had a future before you greater than any of us. Once get that invention of yours perfected, and your name will be known all over the land. And you're going to be cured of your lameness yet. I'm sure of it."

"Of course you are," put in Bob heartily. "And as to that invention, we're all keenly interested in that. We're radio bugs, you know. Something about the microphone, isn't it, that you're working on?"

"That's it," replied Jesse Farmer, a tinge of color coming into his pale cheeks. "You know how it is sometimes, when you're listening in and all of a sudden the music seems to die away. That's because the singer has turned away and isn't singing directly into the mike. Now, I've got an idea of a mike different from any others, so constructed that it will keep the tone even or practically so whether the singer is directly facing the microphone or not."

"That will be great!" exclaimed Joe enthusiastically. "I've often been sore when the tones have varied. Sometimes it has seemed as if an SOS signal had come in and stopped it altogether."

"Of course it may all flivver," said Jesse deprecatingly; "but all the same I hope I'm on

the right track. I'll be mighty disappointed if it doesn't work."

"I'll bet it'll work," said Joe encouragingly. "And while you're resting up at our house you can go right on with your experiments. I've got a dandy set, a six-tuber, and you can have it all to yourself. Make my room your workshop."

"I don't know why you're all so good to me," said Jesse, his voice faltering.

"And another thing!" put in Bob, hastening to cover up the lad's emotion. "We'll have Doctor Dale—the pastor of the Old First Church—come to see you. What he doesn't know about radio isn't worth knowing. He's helped us immensely in a hundred ways, and his advice may be worth a lot to you. And you needn't be afraid to let him know the secrets of your invention, for he's as white as they make them."

"That's dandy," replied Jesse. "I've often felt the need of some one I could talk things over with without being afraid he might steal my idea."

It was not long before they reached the Atwood house and the boys jumped out to assist the injured ones.

Just then Buck Looker and his special crony, Carl Lutz, came along. They stopped in curiosity as Brandon Harvey, with his head bandaged,

stepped out, and they were still more curious when the boys lifted out the lame boy.

"What's the big idea, I wonder," remarked Lutz to his companion.

"Search me," replied Buck Looker, with a coarse laugh. "Looks to me like a cripples' convention."

Jesse's face flushed at the cruel stab.

Bob saw the flush and his blood boiled. He threw a look at the pair that caused the laughter to die out of their faces. Then he went on with the work of helping Jesse into the Atwood home.

Luckily Dr. Atwood was in. A few words explained the situation. The welcome extended by the family was as cordial as Joe's had been, and in a few minutes Jesse had been put to bed and Brandon Harvey's wound had been examined, treated and re-bandaged.

Bob had barely waited to be relieved of Jesse's weight before he left the house.

"Where are you going?" asked Joe.

"Just a little thing I have to attend to," returned Bob vaguely. "I'll be right back."

He hurried out of the gate just in time to see Buck Looker and Carl Lutz turning the corner of the next street.

CHAPTER III

THRASHING A CAD

THE street into which Looker and Lutz had turned was a secluded one, for which Bob blessed his stars, for the business he had in mind could best be attended to without too much publicity.

He turned the corner and went on almost at a run till he had nearly caught up with the figures ahead of him.

They heard the sound of hurrying feet and turned about to look into Bob's blazing eyes.

For a moment they recoiled and then, reassured as they saw that they were two against one, faced him with a swagger beneath which a keen observer might have detected a tremor.

"Look who's here," said Buck truculently.

"Seems to be all fussed up about something," sneered Lutz.

"How does he get that way?" queried Buck.

Bob advanced on Buck with his fists clenched.

"You'll know sooner than you like how I get this way," he announced. "I want to tell you,

Buck Looker, that you're a low cur and a coward to insult a cripple."

"No one can talk to me that way and get away with it," blustered Buck, with a side look at Lutz for support.

"Can't he?" asked Bob. "Well, here's the proof that he can."

His fist shot out and caught Buck full in the jaw.

Buck staggered back, and only his collision with the trunk of a tree prevented him from measuring his length on the ground.

He recovered himself, and with a grunt of fury rushed at Bob.

"Come along, Carl!" Buck roared. "Let's do him up! We'll show him where he gets off!"

Bob stepped deftly aside, evading Buck's bull-like rush, and as his adversary went past caught him with another blow in the chin that made his teeth rattle. Then he turned just in time to ward off a blow from Carl with his left arm, while with his right he drove his second foe back with a hard one to the chest.

"You want some too, do you?" panted Bob. "Well, come along and you'll get plenty."

For the next minute or two there was a melee of flying fists. It was an unequal battle, for each of his opponents was of about the same size and weight as Bob, and though he could have

beaten either of them separately easily enough, the odds were heavily against him.

Still for a while he neutralized those odds by his coolness and cleverness, ducking, side-stepping, feinting, and getting in telling blows where they would do the most good. But at a moment when he was launching out at Buck, Lutz got behind him and before he could recover his balance grabbed his arms and held them tightly.

"Now I've got him," yelled Lutz. "Soak him, Buck! Smash him!"

With a gloating grin on his battered face Buck drew back his fist. Before he could let it go there was a yell, and Joe Atwood was upon him like a pile driver.

"I'm in on this!" he shouted, and drove back Buck with a blow that rocked him from head to heels.

At the same instant Bob wrenched himself free from the grasp of Carl and, turning round, tore into him like a wildcat.

For a moment longer Buck and Carl tried to defend themselves against the furious onslaught. Then they weakened and scuttled away like hares, Buck's cap flying from his head with the speed he was making.

"Maybe he'll come back for it," remarked Joe hopefully as he picked up the headpiece and hung it on a fence.

"Not a chance," grinned Bob. "He's started on a Marathon."

The two boys looked at each other and laughed.

"What on earth possessed you to tackle both of them at once?" Joe asked of Bob.

"I only started out for Buck," explained Bob, as they retraced their steps toward the Atwood home. "But I suppose I might have known that both would pile into me. That's their idea of fair play. But how did it happen that you came along right in the nick of time?"

"I caught the look you turned on those fellows when Buck made that fling at Jesse," replied Joe, "and when you left the house so suddenly I guessed what was in your mind. So as soon as I could I came after you. You were so excited that you didn't see me come up."

"You were Johnny-on-the-spot, all right," laughed Bob. "Buck would have had a sweet time pasting me while Carl held my arms. Those fellows are sports, all right."

His friends' flushed and rumpled appearance awoke the curiosity of Jimmy when they returned, and many were the chuckles with which he heard of the discomfiture of their old enemies.

"You ought to have taken me along," he said reproachfully to Joe. "I wouldn't have missed it for a farm."

They found that Jesse, after Dr. Atwood's

skilful ministrations, had sunk into a restful sleep. Jimmy left for home and Bob and his father returned to the Layton house, taking Brandon Harvey with them. The latter was feeling much better now, and Dr. Atwood predicted that he would be able to leave with the boys on their postponed journey in two or three days.

Herb got back late that afternoon with the news that Agnes was again with the friends she had been visiting at Greenfield and was feeling as well as could be expected after such a shock.

"But I had no luck searching for the twelve hundred dollars and the bankbook she lost," he said, shaking his head disconsolately. "I looked for it everywhere on the bank, and even felt about in the water where it was shallow. I guess she'll have to kiss it good-bye. It's too bad, too, for it was too much to lose. The bankbook, of course, doesn't matter much, for she can get a new one. But it sure was a big wad of money."

After the exciting events of the day the boys slept heavily that night. They awoke refreshed and looking forward eagerly to the resumption of their interrupted trip.

Their first thought was of the crippled lad, and the others were glad to learn from Joe that he was doing finely, so well, in fact, that it would

be all right to go in to see him for a little while that evening.

True to his promise, Bob had called on Dr. Dale and told him about Jesse. The doctor was keenly sympathetic and interested and promised to drop around and see the young inventor.

He did so that very evening shortly after the Radio Boys had gathered at the Atwood home. He was a pronounced favorite there, as he was almost everywhere, and received the heartiest kind of welcome.

Jesse was drawn to him at once, and the doctor was equally attracted to the unfortunate boy. Unfortunate only in a physical sense, however, for it was not long before the keen perception of Dr. Dale told him that behind that pale face was the brain of a genius.

Joe's receiving set was in prime condition and fully justified his pride in it. Its sensitiveness and selectivity brought enthusiastic praise from Jesse. Joe had picked up from the various programs the choicest offerings of different broadcasting stations, and he turned in at intervals on New York, Chicago, Detroit, Denver and other distant places, even going so far afield as Miami and Cuba.

"I could get Los Angeles just as well," he declared proudly, "only we'd have to sit up too

late. But when Jesse gets stronger he can pick it up himself."

"It's a dandy set," affirmed Jesse with enthusiasm. "It doesn't seem as though it could be more perfect."

"But it can," admitted Joe. "We're a long way from the last word in radio. There's always something turning up that makes it a wee bit better."

"That's right," agreed Dr. Dale. "A few days ago I spent a day rummaging around the leading radio plants in New York, and I discovered a lot of new wrinkles. Little things, some of them were, but you know the old saying that it's the 'trifles that make perfection.'

"For one thing," he went on, "the tuning has been simplified. The majority of receivers are adjusted by one or two tuning controls. The development of the gang condenser arrangement—that is, the placing of several variable condensers on a single shaft and the operation of them by one control—has facilitated tuning. These sets have generally one or two thin milled wheels, the edges of which extend through slits in the panel."

"Gee!" put in Joe, "it oughtn't to be harder to tune such a receiver than it is to wind a watch."

"It isn't," replied Dr. Dale. "These wheels revolve the drum or cylinder on which the wave

length settings appear through a small opening in the panel. Some have a tiny electric lamp behind the drum to illuminate the readings and others have space provided so that the call letters can be penciled on the drum alongside the wave length settings."

"If they keep on, by and by the sets will tune themselves!" exclaimed Jimmy.

"Hardly that," laughed the doctor. "We can't get rid yet of the human equation. But it all tends in the direction of greater simplicity and more perfect selectivity.

"Another thing I was struck by," he continued, "was the large number of sets being made to operate without batteries. Connections are provided for attachment to the light socket of the 110 volt alternating current lines. So that in any town that has an electric lighting plant one can dispense with batteries."

"But suppose you've already built a set to operate with batteries and wanted to change?" asked Bob.

"That's been thought out," was the reply. "In that case one can have a "B" eliminator that supplies the plate current direct from the lighting mains. Some of these also serve as power amplifiers that can be controlled from a whisper to a tremendous volume."

"I thought that there was a little danger con-

nected with using the ordinary current supply," said Joe dubiously.

"There might have been in the early stages of radio development," replied the doctor. "But now they have such safeguards that a set relying on it is practically foolproof.

"I saw a metal chassis that I liked," Dr. Dale went on. "Most of the delicate parts of the set are completely enclosed within the chassis so that the entire circuit can be easily removed from the cabinet without danger of breaking wires. The metal chassis also acts as a shield to prevent reaction of sensitive circuits to outside electrical influences, so eliminating howls and broad tuning, making the new sets more selective than the majority of the old receivers."

"Say, that's great!" remarked Joe, who was drinking in every word.

"Then there has been a great improvement in loud speakers. You know how many there are that are all right on the high notes but blur when it comes to the bass sounds so that they become merely a rumble. But one or two of the latest types I noticed brought in the low notes as clearly as the high. You could hear the drums of the orchestra as well as you could the piccolos."

Jesse had been listening with intent interest. Once or twice he had been on the point of asking a question, but had not wanted to interrupt.

Now as the doctor paused, the crippled lad ventured to speak.

"Did you notice any improvement in the microphone while you were in New York, Doctor?" he asked eagerly.

"No," replied the doctor, "I can't say that I did. The broadcasting stations seem to be using the same type they've been using right along."

"But you think there's room for improvement, don't you?" asked Jesse.

At that moment the vocal selection that was coming over the radio seemed to die away. There was a pause of a second or two and then the song went on with the usual volume.

"There's the answer, right there!" exclaimed Jesse excitedly. "The singer forgot and turned from the mike and we lost the notes. Why should we lose them? We needn't lose them! Not with the right kind of a mike!"

"Right you are," agreed Dr. Dale. "That ought to be remedied. And the one who's going to give the world the perfect mike," he added, as he bent over and patted the boy's shoulder, "is named Jesse Farmer!"

CHAPTER IV

OFF FOR GOLD VALLEY

A FLUSH of gratification overspread the face of the crippled lad. Enthusiasm kindled in his eyes.

"It's great of you to say that, Doctor Dale," he said diffidently. "I've been working on the idea a long while. But some one may find the answer before I do. Or perhaps I may never find it at all. But, anyway, it is a thing worth working for."

"It surely is," agreed the doctor cordially.

"Gee, wouldn't it be swell!" Jimmy broke in, with a grin. "No need of worrying over the performers. What they won't do the mike will—eh, Jesse?"

"Something like that," agreed the lad, with a more natural manner than he had yet shown. "A lot could be done with a perfect microphone."

"You bet," assented Bob. "And say, Jesse, now that I know what you're trying to do, I'd almost as leave sit here and watch you do it as

to go out West. Think of all we may be missing, fellows!"

"Yeah. Put off your experiments till we get home, will you, Jesse? Be a sport!" joked Herb.

There was a good deal more of talk about radio, the boys enthusiastic, the doctor encouraging, until Jesse Farmer almost forgot that he was a cripple and felt for one brief hour that he was something like other boys.

"I hope the poor kid does stumble on something good," said Joe, as the Radio Boys were discussing the matter the next day.

"Yes, and it would be fine if he could make money enough for that operation he talks about," replied Joe. "He's a proud chap, and he wouldn't like to have any help but his own."

"It's hard for a fellow with two good legs," said Jimmy, his face very round and solemn, "to guess how it feels to have to sit still all day."

"Especially if there were a well-filled cookie jar in the pantry, and he couldn't get at it," put in Herb.

"Jimmy'd get to that, all right, if he had to roll downstairs," grinned Joe.

But despite their fun and good spirits, the Radio Boys were deeply interested in the case of the young inventor who had come so strangely into their lives, and wished with all their hearts

that he might hit on something that would make life easier and pleasanter for him.

In two days more, Brandon Harvey, now quite himself again after his shake-up in the accident, was anxious to be off. The boys were no less eager, and it was agreed that they should start on the following day. This time they were to go straight from the Clintonia station.

The morning dawned clear and dazzling, and after a hasty breakfast the party were driven to the station. As they whizzed along through the streets they felt once more the contrast between their vigorous bodies full of health and vitality and that of Jesse Farmer, confined to his chair, barred cruelly, it seemed to them, from the joyous brotherhood of youth.

They reached the station just as the train was drawing in, and with the sense of adventure they always had when starting on a journey swung themselves aboard and went to find their places in their Pullman coach.

Once settled in their seats, their bags in their places, the precious radio sets carefully bestowed, and the train gathering speed over the shining rails, Joe turned to Brandon Harvey.

"You haven't told us a lot about this gold mine of yours, and I must say we're curious," he said.

"That's putting it mildly," observed Bob, with a grin.

Mr. Harvey studied the fast moving landscape for a moment and then turned with a smile to the boys.

"I don't wonder that you're curious," he said. "I must admit to a lot of curiosity about that mine myself. In fact, I haven't much more of an idea than you boys have just what we're running into."

That was something of a poser. The boys said nothing but waited eagerly for the older man to continue. This the latter did after a moment of frowning thought.

"I suppose I might as well tell you the whole story as I know it," he went on. "The mine that has come so unexpectedly into my possession is called the Duplex Mine, and is located in a place called Gold Valley."

"Sounds good," grinned Herb.

"Sounds gold," amended Jimmy, and Herb looked around for something to throw at him. Finding nothing more movable than the car seats, he relinquished his design and fixed his attention once more on Mr. Harvey.

"Yes, it sounds good," the latter agreed with Herb. "But it still remains to find out whether there actually is gold in Gold Valley—or at least in that part of it called the Duplex Mine. Now I'll tell you briefly how this mine came into my possession."

He paused for a moment and then continued more briskly:

"You see, I had two distant cousins—twins. They were considered the black sheep of the family, and I won't waste time telling you the trouble they got themselves and others into. It's enough to say that when these twins evinced a desire to go out West on a mining venture no one in the family cared to stand in their way."

"Glad enough to give 'em the bum's rush, eh?" asked Herb, with a grin.

Brandon Harvey smiled.

"Something like that," he rejoined. "Though of course no one explained it quite that way to the twins," he added. "In fact, the various members of the family were unusually cordial to them and took up a collection to get them started. I chipped in with the rest and was there at the send-off."

"Here's your hat, what's your hurry?" laughed Bob.

"Exactly. The twins must have been surprised, since most of their schemes had been treated with a distinct lack of cordiality. Anyway, as it happened, I was able to put a larger share than the rest in the pool that was to send the brothers West and out of harm's way—or at least out of our way."

"Must have been a pretty bad lot if you felt that way about them," observed Joe.

"That's just the point," protested Brandon Harvey. "They weren't a bad lot at all. As a matter of fact, they were extremely attractive, a lovable, reckless, daredevil couple of idiots who could never resist diving in where trouble was thickest. So they were always getting into scrapes, and it often took money to get them out. They were as alike as two peas, too. You couldn't have told them apart except for the fact that Jim had broken his nose when he was a kid and carried a lump on it for the rest of his life. I liked them both," Harvey added reminiscently. "Liked 'em exceedingly—especially old Jim."

"But they're both dead now?" Joe stated rather than asked.

Mr. Harvey nodded.

"Jerry died first, three or four years ago, leaving all he had to Jim. And now old Jim is gone. And the astonishing thing is that he has left me the mine in Gold Valley."

"And you don't know yet whether there's any gold in the mine or not?" asked Herb.

"I have had an interview with Guy Grimshaw, a Western mine expert, who came on to see me," Mr. Harvey returned. "Grimshaw says that Indians once had the mine but had been induced to sell out years before to a white man at what

would seem to be a ridiculously low figure. That man in turn sold it to the twins."

He hesitated before he continued in an odd tone:

"Grimshaw seems to think that the mine is practically worthless. That's what he said. But somehow or other, I don't exactly trust this fellow Grimshaw. He has what you may call a shifty eye. And the fact that he made me an offer for the property before I even had a chance to get out there and look at it, naturally made me a little suspicious."

"You mean that he was trying to run down the mine to you so that he could get it for a song?" asked Bob.

"That's possible," answered Harvey. "At any rate, I made up my mind to go and have a look at the property before turning it over to somebody else. Otherwise, I might regret it all my life."

"And that's how we came to have this glorious outing!" chortled Herb. "Something tells me that we're going to have plenty of excitement on this trip."

The journey passed without special incident, and four days later the Radio Boys alighted at a forlorn station on a sun-drenched plain. On one side was a waste of prairie extending to the foot of a mountain range. On the right of the

station was a scattering of dingy, dilapidated buildings of the rudest kind.

"Looks like a dump, sure enough," remarked Brandon Harvey, as the boys stood with their luggage on one end of the platform. "Still, I see some sort of general store over there. We'll lay in some provisions and arrange for some kind of a rig to get us over to an old cabin that will be the first stop on our trip to Gold Valley."

The place appeared deserted even for a Western mining town in the daytime before the night's reveling set in. The station was without the usual number of loungers, and the one street of the sad-looking town was practically deserted.

Perhaps it was because of this scarcity of people in sight that Bob noticed with especial curiosity a figure that emerged for a moment from behind a building and then slunk out of sight again.

There was something furtive about the action that stirred Bob with suspicion.

As Herb, Joe, and Jimmy followed Brandon Harvey through the doorway of the general store, Bob slipped away and went swiftly and quietly toward the building behind which the man had disappeared.

He had almost reached it when he realized that he was not alone. Joe had observed his desertion of the party and had followed him.

Bob was about to utter a low-toned warning when the sound of voices came to the boys. They peered cautiously around the corner of the building in time to see three figures disappear behind a row of freight cars.

The boys dared venture no further for fear of discovery, and so only caught scraps of a conversation that might have been of intense interest if they could have heard it all.

The words "mine" and "Indians" came to them, together with some scattered remarks, one of sinister import.

"Them's the guys," reached their ears in a heavy voice.

"We can't afford to let 'em get there," added a second fellow.

"He looks like a husky bozo, but the others are just kids," came from the third man.

Bob and Joe exchanged glances. The same thought was in the mind of each.

"Do you suppose they mean Mr. Harvey?" Bob asked in a low tone.

Before Joe could answer Herb called to them from the porch of the store, and they went toward him reluctantly. They had heard fragments of what had certainly sounded like conspiracy. They were on edge to learn more.

Herb and Jimmy greeted them with good-natured chaffing.

"Where do you fellows get off, deserting the party like that?" queried Herb. "Thought you'd get out of your share of toting the provisions, I suppose. Well, I'm telling you that's the time you missed your guess."

Mr. Harvey was negotiating with the owner of a car to drive them out to the shack they would stop at on the way to Gold Valley. The latter, a lank, rangy looking youth, readily consented to convey them over the prairie to the cabin.

This cabin was near the head of the trail that led to Gold Valley and the twins had made the place their headquarters while prospecting about the place. Having been taken there from the railroad station in the flivver, the new owner and the boys would get horses from a ranch in the neighborhood and would go on farther on horseback.

"Pile in, folks, and I'll strap your luggage on the running board," the youth said. "It's a right smart trip, but I guess," with an amiable grin, "if you can stand it, the flivver can."

The boys had their doubts about this, as they viewed the flivver. The rattletrap car looked to be of the make of 1912, and when the engine was started shivered depressingly.

"If we get a mile from here in that vehicle we're lucky," Herb confided to Jimmy in an undertone.

Brandon Harvey overheard the remark and smiled.

"Pretty sad-looking vehicle, I admit," he said. "Still, I suppose we'll have to risk it. Doesn't seem to be another conveyance for hire in the town."

While the driver went to get their luggage, Bob seized the occasion to tell the radio man of the scraps of conversation he and Joe had overheard.

Mr. Harvey seemed to be considerably disturbed over the incident.

"I suppose you didn't get a good look at these men," he remarked.

Bob shook his head.

"Not a good look, no. But all three seemed to be rather short and stocky, and one of them had a very swarthy complexion. I wish we could have heard the rest of what they had to say."

Mr. Harvey looked thoughtful.

"I have a hunch we're running into trouble, boys," he said. "I think it will be well for us from now on to watch our step."

CHAPTER V

OVER THE PRAIRIE

WHEN the travelers had piled themselves and their belongings into the flivver and were rattling out of the town they found that the prairie road crossed the railroad tracks, so that for a moment or two they had a clear view of the space on the farther side of the row of freight cars.

Bob and Joe looked keenly for any sign of the three men they had glimpsed a short time before. But for as far as the eye could see the space was as empty and deserted as the town itself.

"I'd give a lot to know just who those men were," said Brandon Harvey in a low voice, so as not to be heard by the driver. "It helps some to know who your enemies are."

"Then you think they were enemies?" asked Joe in a similar tone.

Mr. Harvey shrugged.

"From what you and Bob overheard one would think so. Still," in a lighter vein, "we're certainly not going to borrow trouble. The

circumstances of my inheritance are so queer," he added with a whimsical smile, "that I suppose I'm expecting all sorts of complications. Let's forget it for the present."

But the Radio Boys could not dismiss the matter so easily. Brandon Harvey's agitation on hearing the news had communicated itself to them. It made them realize that their host did expect trouble in connection with the mine, and in that rough region when trouble did start it was apt to be serious.

"If there's going to be any trouble at all, it's likely to start soon," mused Herb.

"It's apt to start right now with this flivver going to pieces in the middle of the road," said Jimmy, holding tightly to his side of the car as it bumped and slithered over the uneven road.

"We'll sure be lucky if it holds together until we strike camp," observed Bob, with a grin.

"Give Jimmy a doughnut," chuckled Herb. "It'll help fortify him against the hardships of the journey."

"Couldn't eat it if I had it," grumbled Doughnuts. "My mouth doesn't stay in one place long enough to find it. Ouch! That was a high one," as the car struck a particularly rough place and bounded into the air.

The driver looked back and grinned amiably.

"Glad to see you're still there," he remarked.

"Thought one or two of you might have been jolted out that time. We ain't got many more bumps like that," he added as a reassuring afterthought.

The road ran for a considerable distance along level, unbroken prairie, where the long grass, waving in the wind, rippled like the undulating waves of the sea.

Gradually they neared the mountains that loomed in the background, reached them at last, and began an almost continuous climb. Now and then the road dipped sharply, and then the shrieking of the flivver's brakes broke raucously upon the still air, starting innumerable echoes, while the car slid precariously along the narrow road.

For a great part of the distance the scenery was magnificent, and when the boys were not engaged in sitting on the floor or in one another's laps they enjoyed it immensely.

"If we ever get to the cabin without being jolted to pieces, we'll have something to remember, anyway," affirmed Herb.

"Yeah. Look at that stream down there," said Joe, pointing to a silvery ribbon of water far beneath. "Looks to be a mile below."

"Shouldn't like to drop that distance," remarked Brandon Harvey as the flivver skirted perilously close to the edge of the road.

"We'd have a swim, anyway," put in Herb;

"and that's probably more than we'll get in the place where we're going."

"I don't know about that," replied the radio man. "Gold Valley is nested right among the hills. I don't imagine we'll have to go far in any direction to find a swimming pool. That's one good thing in this section. It abounds in streams having their source high in the mountains. Take it all in all, I guess you'll have all the swimming you have time for."

After a long climb up and up until it seemed to the boys they must eventually touch the sky, the car swerved about a turn in the road and took them out upon a cleared, level space, a sort of plateau. The spot commanded a wonderful view of the surrounding country.

Below them was a valley, green and fertile, gleaming in the sun, nestling among the mountain ridges.

The driver of the flivver had stopped the vociferous engine. He spoke now in a lazy, drawling tone.

"That isn't Gold Valley, but it might be called that," he said. "Seems more reasons than one for givin' it that name with the sun shinin' thataway."

Mr. Harvey nodded.

"There's gold on the surface, whatever there may be underneath," he agreed. "Is that tiny

shack over there in the west the cabin we're making for?"

"Reckon it is," replied the driver. His foot on the self-starter once more shattered the pleasant silence, and the flivver moved complainingly down a steeper, narrower road than any they had yet encountered.

"This yere road's really meant fur a hoss," the young fellow called back to them. "Reckon nothin' in the line of cars but a flivver runnin' on one cylinder could make it, anyways."

"I'd sure hate to risk a fine car on it," grinned Bob.

The Westerner chuckled.

"You're tootin'," he agreed. "I ain't never seen no high-priced car around this part of the country, an' I reckon I never will. Whoa there, Lizzie!" as the flivver skidded wildly over toward the side of the road. "Think you kin climb that mountain? Well, now, I'm tellin' yuh you can't do better'n jest stick to the road a bit longer, if you kin."

After several happenings that sent shivers up and down the spines of the passengers, they reached the bottom of the descent in safety. They bumped along a narrow woods road for a space, then left the shade of the woodlands to enter upon the last phase of their journey.

They were at the camping spot they had started

for. The sun beat down upon them as they bumped along the dusty road leading to the deserted mining cabin. It had looked romantic enough as they had first glimpsed it from the mountain, a black spot against the golden tints of the valley. But now, as they approached it from the road, they saw it for what it was—a rough mining shack sadly in need of repair.

As the flivver stopped and the boys jumped out, they looked about them expectantly. Jimmy was frankly disappointed.

"This may be all right," he said, "but where is the mine?"

Brandon Harvey laughed.

"You expected to see it right alongside this cabin, I suppose," he said. "As a matter of fact the Duplex Mine is back of us—quite a climb up into the hills. This is an old cabin that the twins lived in for a time while they were prospecting."

The driver, who had been helping unload the car, looked at the speaker queerly.

"You reckonin' on workin' the Duplex Mine?" he asked.

CHAPTER VI

A STORM BREWING

MR. HARVEY returned the young fellow's look.

"We might," he said guardedly, in answer to the driver's question. "Why?"

The Westerner shrugged and turned his back to his car.

"Nuthin', Mister," he replied. "I was jest a wonderin'."

The cabin was set on a rise of ground, and had attached to it a shed, or lean-to, that was slightly raised above the rest of the building.

They tried the door and found that it was unlocked. It yielded with a scraping of rusty hinges to their touch, and they found themselves in the dim interior.

It was covered with dust and cobwebs. The windows were so coated with dirt that the brilliant sunshine without glimmered only faintly through them.

At first the sun-dazzled eyes of the boys could make nothing of the furnishings of the room.

But gradually objects became more distinct. A rough log table stood out from the gloom. Two or three rude benches were scattered about. There was a rusty iron stove with a stove pipe cutting through the roof of the shack. At one side of the room were two long bunks.

"Evidently this was living room, kitchen, sleeping quarters and all," conjectured Bob.

"Looks as if some of us would have to sleep on the floor or on the roof," grinned Jimmy. "This place was built for twins, not quintuplets."

"I suppose my cousins spent little enough time here," remarked Brandon Harvey. "It wasn't much of a home, but just a place to eat and sleep in. There may be a room opening off this."

The words were scarcely spoken when Jimmy gave a whoop of delight.

"Here it is," he cried. "I've found a door!"

They flung this open and found beyond a small room, barely larger in fact than a good-sized closet, which the twins had evidently used as a storeroom. It was piled with picks and shovels, specimens of the rock taken from the earth and some sacks thrown carelessly in a corner.

"Not much in the way of sleeping quarters here," opined Jimmy.

"Cleared out and with a window hacked in the

side of it, it may be all right," observed Herb. "Anyway, there's the lean-to. Maybe we could make something of that."

But they found the lean-to no more than a wood and wash shed. Firewood was neatly stacked in it, and on a tall, improvised stool stood a wash basin, in which the water had been left to evaporate, turning the inside of the basin to a dull, rust-red color. A soiled roller towel was hung on the inside of the door, a last pathetic reminder of the twin who had willed his all to Brandon Harvey.

The boys turned back into the main room of the shack. Mr. Harvey had paid the young Westerner for the use of the flivver, and now the Radio Boys crowded to the door to see the last of the stranger.

The latter hesitated a moment, twirling his hat in his fingers.

"You're sure enough goin' to work the mine?" he asked, with a repetition of the queer glance he had given Harvey before.

"Sure thing," replied Harvey. "Why?"

"Oh, nothin'," the man answered vaguely. "I was jest askin'."

He climbed into his seat. The flivver rattled and bucked, and then sprang off in an erratic burst of speed. The man at the wheel waved his broad-brimmed hat at them in a gesture of

farewell and then was swallowed up in the dust of the road.

"Alone on the mountains," laughed Herb. "That would make a good subtitle for a movie."

"I wonder why that fellow looked so queer when he asked you about your working the mine, Mr. Harvey?" asked Joe, who had been busy with his thoughts.

"I don't know, I'm sure," replied Brandon, frowning thoughtfully. "He may have been merely surprised or just plain curious. I shouldn't be surprised if there were all sorts of odd rumors afloat about this inheritance of mine. Anyway, our role is just to sit tight and await developments, if there are to be any. Meanwhile, what do you say to something to eat?"

Joe and Herb brought out a battered frying pan and a still more disreputable coffee pot from a row of shelves back of the stove, while Bob and Jimmy rummaged for food stuffs among the packages they had brought from the general store.

"Here's a can of pressed chicken, hooray!" shouted Jimmy. "And a can of baked beans—"

"A loaf of bread, some butter and bacon and a bottle of milk," Bob added to the summary. "I guess we're in no danger of starving for a while."

They found some crockery that was as nicked

and battered as the cooking utensils, but it served the purpose of the hungry boys as well as the finest china could have done.

When the repast was ready Bob called Mr. Harvey, who had been out for a survey of the surroundings.

"There's a well at the back," said their host as he came in, "and a spring of the best drinking water you ever tasted. There's one thing certain, and that is that we won't lack for water while we're here."

When supper was over the Radio Boys went out to inspect the water and found it sparkling and ice cold. They drew a bucketful from the well for dish-washing purposes and turned toward the house.

They looked up at the sky and found that the sun was dimmed and seemed to be shining through a queer yellow haze. A strange silence was everywhere. The hum and buzz of the insect world had ceased. It was as though Nature for a spell were holding her breath in anticipation of something.

"There's a storm coming!" exclaimed Brandon. "They come up mighty sudden in this region. Better get inside."

A quick gust came, whirling the dust in clouds about them, filling their eyes and noses and almost choking them.

They charged into the cabin and with difficulty pushed the door shut behind them.

"The West is giving us a fine reception," grinned Bob.

"It's almost like a cyclone," asseverated Jimmy. "Feel the cabin shake. The old shack's doing a Charleston."

The flimsy structure did indeed seem in danger, as blast after blast beat against it.

Brandon Harvey shot home the heavy wooden bolt on the inside of the door while the other boys ran to close the windows.

"Whew!" whistled Herb. "Lucky this cabin backs up against a hill. Breaks the force of the wind from that side, anyway."

"Never saw a storm come up as quickly as that," observed Joe, and added with a grin: "There'll be plenty of static to-night."

That reminded Bob of something.

"Let's take a look at the radio sets," he suggested. "I hope they haven't been hurt by the jolting they got on the road."

They unwrapped the precious sets and handled them lovingly. It almost seemed to them as if the sets looked back at them smilingly as at friends.

"Seem to be all right," stated Bob after a careful examination.

"I'm mighty glad we have those sets along,"

said Brandon Harvey. "At any moment they may come in mighty handy."

"For sending and receiving both," declared Joe.

"Especially for sending," went on Harvey. "Receiving will be for pleasure. Sending will be for business. If we get in a tight place it may bring help."

"But how about the juice?" asked Bob.

"There's a cable conveying electric power to different towns that passes near the mine, so I was told," replied Brandon. "We'll probably be able to connect with that in case of need."

The bunks could accommodate only four and they drew lots to see who should occupy them.

Jimmy drew the unlucky number, and amid the good-natured gibes of his friends rolled himself in a blanket and prepared to make as good a bed as possible on the floor,

In spite of the roaring of the storm, the boys fell asleep almost at once, and woke to find sunlight streaming in through the grimy windows of the cabin.

Jimmy was still sleeping quietly in his blanket when the others woke, and, slipping out of their bunks, they prodded and pommeled him into wakefulness.

"Aw, say, can't you leave a feller alone?" grumbled the unfortunate, sitting up and rubbing

his eyes. "I was just dreaming of home and pancakes—pancakes smothered in butter and maple syrup—"

His plaint was interrupted by Herb, who wound the blanket around Jimmy's head, effectually stifling any further observations on the part of that young epicure.

Jimmy emerged from the swathing folds a minute later, red and belligerent.

"It's a sin to waste a mattress on Jimmy," laughed Herb. "That fat of his serves as padding—and look at the dreams he has!"

"He carries his own mattress with him," grinned Joe. "The boy has the right idea."

"Aw, cut it out," commanded Jimmy. "I may be fat, but I have a sweet disposition. If I hadn't I'd have knocked you fellers for a goal. Hey you, Herb, give me that shoe. It's mine."

They made a hearty breakfast of bacon and eggs, bread and butter and coffee, and were just washing the dishes after it when they received an unexpected caller.

The boys and Brandon Harvey heard the pounding of a horse's hoofs long before the rider came into view, and they stepped out of the door to see the traveler go by.

But the stranger did not pass on. Instead, he stopped, swung himself from the saddle and came toward them, leading his horse.

He was a man of medium height, thin and wiry, with leathery skin burned a dark brown by exposure to wind and weather. His eyes were bright and restless and his nose predatory, vaguely suggestive of a bird of prey. The mouth was hidden under a drooping mustache.

The man was smiling as he drew near, and his eyes traveled from one to the other of the group before the cabin.

"Mr. Harvey?" he said inquiringly to Brandon.

"My name is Harvey," said the latter courteously. "I notice that you've come a long way to see me," he continued with a glance at the sweating horse.

A frown crossed the stranger's face. His annoyance was momentary, however. He smiled and answered blandly.

"Not far, but fast. I heard of your intended trip to Gold Valley and thought it my duty to warn you."

"Warn me?" repeated Mr. Harvey, with a half smile. "Of what, may I ask?"

The stranger made a deprecatory gesture.

"My horse is tired and hot," he said. "If I could have a little water for him and a chair for myself."

"I beg your pardon," said Brandon, instantly the courteous host. "I should have suggested that myself."

Water was brought in a pail for the horse and the animal drank deeply. Brandon led the newcomer inside the cabin and the Radio Boys followed, on tiptoe with expectation.

The dark-skinned man with the restless eyes had come to warn them. But of what? The word had an ominous sound.

"You say you have come to warn me," remarked Mr. Harvey, after he and his guest were seated. "May I again ask what you wish to warn me against?"

"That is what I'm here to tell you," said the other, with a smile he tried to make genial. "You are strangers to this part of the country and can't be expected to know the dangers that just now haunt Gold Valley."

"Dangers?" repeated Brandon Harvey. "I'm afraid I don't understand you. Unless perhaps you mean bobcats and rattlers."

The stranger shook his head.

"I mean neither," he declared. "There are worse things things than bobcats and rattlers!"

CHAPTER VII

THE MYSTERIOUS WARNING

AFTER this cryptic remark there was a pause while the stranger drew a cigarette case from his pocket. He offered it to Mr. Harvey, smiled when the latter refused, extracted a cigarette for himself and lighted it.

"Perhaps I had better introduce myself," he said. "My name is Henry Staley, better known to my friends as Hank Staley. I'm a friend of Guy Grimshaw's, whom I think you know, Mr. Harvey."

The boys exchanged glances. The name struck a responsive chord in their memories. Grimshaw was the Western mining expert who had pronounced the Duplex Mine practically worthless. And this man was a friend of Grimshaw's! With one accord they next glanced at Brandon Harvey. He was smiling amiably.

"Glad to know you, Mr. Staley," Harvey said heartily. The fact that you know Grimshaw is a sufficient recommendation. And now that you

have aroused the curiosity of myself and my young friends here—" he included the boys with a wave of his hand—"perhaps you'll be good enough to explain just what is the danger that threatens us if we go to Gold Valley."

"Not you alone, but any one who enters that place," said Hank Staley impressively. "Plague stalks in that valley. There is an epidemic of foot and mouth disease among the cattle, and recently several cases of smallpox among the Indians have been reported. In fact," the stranger leaned back in chair and fixed Mr. Harvey with his keen eyes, "it's like signing your own death warrant to enter Gold Valley at this time."

The warning was simply stated. The boys felt that they should have been convinced of its sincerity. And yet they were not in the least convinced.

There was something about the man Staley that repelled them. They mistrusted him instinctively. With surprise, they realized that Brandon Harvey did not seem to share their misgivings. On the contrary, he appeared impressed by the stranger's statements.

"I'm inclined to agree with you," he said, "that there are worse things than bobcats and rattlers. Smallpox is one of them. I have no desire to expose either my young friends here or myself to such a menace."

The Radio Boys, who had been listening with increasing dismay to this speech, broke out in a chorus of protests.

"You don't mean to give up the trip, do you?" came from Jimmy, almost in a wail.

"Just now when we're only a stone's throw, you might say, from Gold Valley!" chimed in Joe.

"Anyway, there's no danger of our getting the smallpox," Bob pointed out. "We've all been vaccinated."

But Mr. Harvey shook his head, frowning.

"You boys are in my care," he said gravely. "I can't make playthings out of your lives. Hard to give up the trip, but—" he ended with a gesture of his hand.

Bob happened to be looking full at Hank Staley. Was it his imagination, or did a look of triumph steal into the glittering eyes of their visitor?

The expression vanished almost immediately beneath lowered lids. Bob told himself that he might have been mistaken.

Staley rose from his seat.

"I'm much obliged to you for your warning, Mr. Staley," said Mr. Harvey, as he escorted his visitor to the door.

"No reason to thank me," Staley returned amiably. "It was only decent, that's all. Glad

that I caught you in time. Gold Valley is a place that men keep away from these days."

After a few more words with Brandon Harvey and a pleasant nod to the boys, Staley mounted his horse and cantered away down the road.

Harvey watched the man until he had disappeared in a cloud of dust. Then he turned to the boys with an odd smile.

"Well, that's that," he remarked. "Now we'd better get ready for Gold Valley as fast as we can."

The bewildered boys thought that they could not have heard aright. They stared at him blankly.

"But you just told that fellow we were going to give it up!" exclaimed Bob.

"Did I?" asked Brandon, smiling. "Think over what I really said. He may have got that impression, but I didn't say so. My attitude was just a blind. It was just as well he should think he had succeeded in frightening us away from the valley. That was what he wanted. If he's been thrown off the scent, so much the better."

"Then you were bluffing all the time!" exclaimed Joe. "Gee, you pulled it off well!"

Brandon Harvey smiled.

"It doesn't do to let your adversary see your hand," he remarked.

Jimmy, whose mind worked more slowly than those of his companions, had been thinking things out.

"Wriggling snakes!" he cried. "Then you think that Staley made up all that stuff about smallpox and an epidemic among the cattle just to keep us away from Gold Valley?"

"I don't know how much of it he made up," replied Brandon. "There may be an epidemic among the cattle for all I know, and a stray Indian or two may have smallpox. But one thing I feel certain of, and that is that Hank Staley has an urgent personal reason for wanting to keep us away from Gold Valley. He started out before daybreak to give us this *warning,* probably afraid we'd get into Gold Valley before he could scare us off. I can read character pretty well, and Hank Staley isn't of the Good Samaritan kind. He has a private ax to grind, or I miss my guess."

The boys listened with avid interest. Gone were their disappointment and chagrin of a few moments before. The venture was assuming added glamour and excitement.

"Then you think the Duplex Mine is valuable after all and that Hank Staley knows it?" asked Bob.

"I'm inclined to think so." Brandon Harvey smiled a little grimly. "Anyway, I intend to find

out for myself pretty soon. You boys ready to travel?"

Were they? What a question!

It was arranged that Bob and Brandon Harvey should journey to the ranch a few miles away and see if they could get the horses necessary for a trip along the steep mountain passes that led to Gold Valley.

"You other fellows have everything packed and ready for the start as soon as we get back," directed Brandon, and added significantly: "I want to get away from this place as soon as possible."

The boys promised to get everything together, and Brandon and Bob started off on their hike.

From the owner of the general store Harvey had learned of the road he would have to follow to reach the ranch, and he also had a rough map of the surrounding country. With a compass also to aid them, the two started confidently for their destination.

"With luck, we ought to reach there before noon," said Brandon as he consulted his watch.

But this estimate proved over-optimistic. Although they tramped steadily, sometimes half lost in woodland, at other times staggering up steep trails that might have given pause to a mountain goat, it was after one o'clock when they arrived at the ranch.

The proprietor, a stout, shaggy-haired man named Topper, came out to meet them, and to him they made known their mission.

"Sure, I can let you have the hosses," agreed Topper. "But before I take you round to the corrals you'd better come in the house and get a bite to eat."

Despite their protestations—which after all were not very earnest—they were led into the house, where a smiling and buxom Mrs. Topper set them down to a meal of warmed over chicken pie and apple dumplings.

Bob ate ravenously, for he was famished after his long hike. And while he ate he listened to the conversation between Topper and Harvey.

Topper knew the country like a book, he said. Furthermore, he evinced no surprise when he learned of his guests' intention to penetrate the valley.

"Lonesome place, though," he said, with a shake of his head. "You figurin' on minin'?" he asked curiously.

Brandon laughed and finished the last of his apple dumpling before replying.

"We'll have to decide that after we reach the valley," he evaded. "By the way, have you heard of any cattle epidemic over that way or any smallpox among the Indians?"

"Not a word," replied Topper, "an' I reckon

I'd 'a' heerd about it as soon as anybody. What put that notion into your head?"

"Oh, I heard something to that effect," replied Brandon carelessly. "And now, Bob, if you're through, we'll go and have a look at those horses."

Topper looked as though he would have liked to pursue the conversation further, but led them out to the corrals without further comment.

"If you're goin' to Gold Valley, you figger on doin' consid'able mountain climbin'," he remarked; "so I'll pick you out some tough little pintos that'll turn the trick. There now, look at that one. How's that fur a hoss?"

Despite Topper's good nature, Brandon found him a shrewd business man, and his pockets were considerably lighter when he and Bob left the place on horseback than they had been when he entered it.

"Nevertheless we have the horses," Brandon commented, with satisfaction. "How does it feel to get a weight off your feet for a while Bob?"

"Great!" replied Bob. "We sure traveled over some pretty rough country coming up. Wonder if the horses will be able to make the grade."

"These horses will," asserted Brandon. "They're as sure-footed as so many goats."

But it was no easy matter to negotiate the nar-

row trails, leading the other horses, and it took them considerably longer to return to the cabin than they had anticipated.

"We won't be able to make a start to-day," declared Brandon, when at last they came in sight of the shack. "Perhaps it will be all the better to wait till morning, for it may be harder to reach Gold Valley than we think and we may need plenty of daylight to do our traveling in."

Herb, Joe, and Jimmy greeted their return with delight, as they were beginning to be worried at the delay.

"Thought that possibly you might have been lost in this wild country," observed Joe.

"Nothing like that," replied Bob, as he dismounted from his horse. "What do you think of these pintos we've brought you?"

"They'd never take any prizes at a horse show," commented Joe, as he looked the pintos over. "But they're a tough looking bunch of little broncs, and I'll bet they can do some traveling."

The boys had all done some riding at home and were at home on horseback. So when Joe suggested that they try out their mounts there was no demur, and they organized an impromptu race along the road, shouting like Comanche Indians.

"Talk about reducing!" said Joe, as at last

they dismounted. "That ought to have taken ten pounds off your weight, Doughnuts."

They rubbed down the horses that night, watered them, and tethered them back of the cabin to graze their own fodder.

"Guess we'd better turn in early," Bob suggested. "We'll have to get up with the birds tomorrow morning."

But long after the candles were extinguished and his comrades were asleep Bob lay awake, listening to the curious night sounds of the region.

Far away, subdued by distance, came the scream of a mountain lion. Nearer, a coyote barked. Over all, was the murmur of the winds through the long grass like the distant sighing of the sea. Bob found himself drifting out on that sound and slipped deep into sleep.

How long he had slept he did not know. But suddenly he found himself sitting up, every sense painfully alert.

Something other than the ordinary night sounds had aroused him. What was it?

Then he heard it again. It was the sharp, frightened neighing of a horse!

CHAPTER VIII

CROOKED WORK

BOB LAYTON was on his feet in an instant. The sound had come from the side of the cabin where the horses were tethered.

"A mountain lion!" was his first thought.

Brandon Harvey's revolver was lying on the table. Bob caught up the weapon and made for the door. There was a stir behind him, and he knew that his chums had also been aroused.

"There's something out there scaring the horses." Bob muttered, as dim forms gathered around him.

The moon had risen, shedding a pale luminance over the scene. The boys went swiftly and stealthily about the side of the house, Bob a little in advance, his weapon ready for action.

They had progressed a little way when Jimmy grasped Bob's arm.

"Look over there," he breathed. "Do you see that?"

"That" was hardly more than a shadow out-

lined against the deeper shadow of the trees. It was the figure of a man running, crouched low.

The boys charged forward, but they were too late. The shadow was swallowed up in the blackness beyond and a crashing among the bushes told that the intruder was making good his escape.

"Now, what do you think of that?" exclaimed Herb.

"Are the horses all right? That's the question," broke in Joe.

Bob and Jimmy were already trying to determine that question, and now Bob called out:

"The horses are all here, fellows. But come and look at this."

The others ran over to him and found that the halter holding one of the horses had been cut almost in two.

Joe gave a low whistle.

"So that was their game!" he exclaimed. "Stealing our horses!"

"Hello, boys, what's the trouble?" This from Brandon Harvey, coming up to them. "What are you doing out here at this time of night? And with a gun, too! Hunting rabbits?"

"It wasn't a rabbit we saw running off to those bushes," said Bob soberly.

He showed Brandon Harvey the cut halter.

"The plot thickens!" exclaimed Mr. Harvey.

"I guess I was right about that fellow Staley."

"Do you think this is his work?" asked Joe.

"I don't know," replied Brandon. "Not Staley in person, perhaps, but some one he has hired to do the trick for him. We may even be shooting wide of the mark at that," he went on, examining again the cut halter. "The midnight caller may after all have been nothing but an ordinary horse thief."

"We're rather out of the way here for that sort of thing, aren't we?" suggested Joe. "This cabin has been deserted for a long time. Unless the thief were watching our movements, he could hardly be expected to know there were horses here."

"While, on the other hand, if that fellow Staley really wants to keep us out of Gold Valley, he could hardly do it better than by stealing our horses—or at least turning them loose to get lost or find their way back to the ranch where you bought them," put in Bob.

"Exactly!" In the moonlight Brandon's face was grim. "I am realizing more and more that it will be worth our while to get to Gold Valley as soon as possible. Meanwhile, we won't let our horses be unguarded again."

For the rest of the night they took turns patroling the camp, but nothing else developed.

At the first streak of dawn all within the little

cabin were wide awake. Breakfast was cooked for the last time over the smoky stove, the horses were watered and all their possessions were packed.

An extra steed had been brought to carry the baggage, including the two radio sets.

"If this pinto stumbles it will be good-bye to our radio sets," said Joe, as he fastened the cinch under a stocky little specimen of horseflesh.

It was a glorious morning, and by the light of it the occurrences of the night before seemed almost like a fantastic dream. But the cut halter was evidence that the dream had been based on fact.

But all dismissed their misgivings as they saw the sun flinging its gorgeous banners over the sky. With hearts beating high with youth and courage, they climbed into their saddles and turned their horses' heads toward the mountain trail.

"We're off!" cried Bob hilariously. "Hooray for a jolly adventure!"

"It will be an adventure all right," replied Herb. "But how jolly it may be we'll know more about later."

"Anyway, it's safe to say we won't have many dull minutes," prophesied Jimmy.

"If last night is a sample of what we have to expect, we won't get much sleep either," re-

marked Herb. "Gee, it's like it is in war, sentry duty and everything."

"Just the same, we're lucky that Bob woke up in time to find that there was something doing," said Joe. "If he hadn't, we'd have been groaning over our luck now and wondering what to do next."

"One thing's certain," affirmed Bob. "And that is that some one wants to keep us out of Gold Valley and wants it mighty bad. There must be some good reason for that."

"Looks as though Gold Valley deserved its name and they know it," agreed Joe. "Gee, wouldn't it be great if Brandon found heaps of gold in that mine?"

They had surmounted one of the ridges of the mountain and come out now on an eminence from which the country was visible for miles around. Below them lay the valley; above them towered still higher peaks than that on which they stood. And all was bathed in sunlight that softened the rugged outlines and made the scene as entrancing as fairyland.

Before them was the trail. This narrowed gradually as it wound about the mountain until it seemed scarcely wider than a footpath.

"Have we got to drive our horses over that?" asked Bob of Harvey, and the latter smiled ruefully.

"We have little choice, as it seems to be the only route we can take," he replied.

"This isn't a road—it's a joke," commented Herb. "And look at the drop on the other side! Five hundred feet if it's an inch!"

"Nevertheless, I guess we'll meet others just as bad before we get to Gold Valley," said Brandon. "We'll have to set our ponies to it and trust them to do the rest. They're mighty surefooted, and they know just as well as we do what it would mean to fall. Give them their head and trust in Providence."

"All right, I'm willing," grinned Herb. "My only hope is that these pintos know their business. If they do, they know more than their riders."

"Since when did Herb grow so modest?" chaffed Bob.

Brandon Harvey took the lead, and the little procession moved on, not without many interior qualms of the boys which, however, they refrained from showing.

It was their first experience of a genuine canyon trail, and they were beginning to find thrills in it that promised to meet even their insatiate thirst for adventure.

They strung out in Indian file, the pack beast in the middle—indeed for most of the way it was impossible to ride two abreast—and allowed the

reins to fall slack on the necks of their wiry mounts. The sober, short-eared animals took the narrow trail as a matter of course, looking neither to right nor left, heads lowered, hoofs feeling each step carefully.

Below lay the gorge, so steep that even to look down it made the boys dizzy, with a rock-bordered stream running through it.

"A fearful drop!" remarked Bob, as he visualized any one whirling through that empty space. "Wouldn't be much left of a fellow after landing down there."

There was a sudden horrified exclamation behind him. Twisting in his saddle, Bob saw a sight that froze the blood in his veins and almost made his heart stop beating.

Herb's pony had stopped short in the trail, snorting. It stood, ears turned back, forelegs braced, staring wild-eyed at something in the road.

It was a rattlesnake, coiled and ready to strike!

CHAPTER IX

OVER THE PRECIPICE

THE suspense lasted only a second. Yet it seemed to Bob an eternity while he sat there horrified, unable to move, utterly helpless.

There was an ominous rattle and the snake struck out viciously. With a wild snort of terror the horse flung itself backward, forelegs waving perilously over the edge of the cliff.

Before the rattler could coil again to strike, the death-dealing hoofs descended, crushing the ugly head of the reptile on the stones of the trail.

Herb had clung to the pony while it reared, but now the swift descent threw him off balance, jolting him from the saddle.

He reached desperately for the saddle horn, but his fingers slipped. He tried for a foothold on the edge of the trail, but the dirt and rock gave way beneath his feet, and with a despairing cry he hurtled backwards into space.

Bob urged his pony as close as he could to the mountainside and flung himself from the

saddle. Sick with horror, he had only one thought in mind. He must get to Herb some way, help him, save him!

The others of the party had heard Herb's cry and were dismounting as rapidly as they could. Herb had brought up the rear of the procession, and Bob had been nearest to him.

The horses stood quietly. Bob kicked the still writhing body of the snake over the precipice and flung himself flat upon his face, peering over the rim of the cliff.

Where was Herb? Lying crushed and mangled on those jagged rocks below? Or—

Eagerly searching the face of the cliff, Bob's eyes came to rest on an object some forty feet below. He cried out hoarsely:

"It's Herb, fellows! See him down there? He's caught in the bushes. All right, Herb?" he called to that figure swaying helplessly over the dizzy space below. "Hold on, old boy. We'll be down there in a jiffy."

By this time Brandon Harvey and the others of the group had reached Bob's side. Peering over, they saw Herb's predicament and realized his horrible danger.

"If we had a rope!" cried Bob.

"We have—in one of the packs!" shouted Brandon. "Help me, you fellows, get it out. Quick!"

The nightmare of those next few seconds! The knots to be untied! The fingers that seemed all thumbs as they fumbled with them! And Herb there, swinging over space with death menacing him in hideous form!

They freed the rope at last, made a loop in it and dangled it over the precipice.

They groaned in dismay. Not long enough by five feet to reach the lad!

"Too short!" groaned Joe. "We've got to go down to him. Look. Those bushes are giving way."

Bob glanced downward. Then his lips tightened and he turned swiftly to Brandon.

"If you will put that rope under my arms and lower me," he cried, "maybe Herb can grab my foot. It's our only chance."

"I can't let you take your life in your hands," replied Brandon. "It's up to me. I'll go—"

But Bob had already drawn the rope over his shoulders and beneath his arms. A glance downward at Herb's swaying figure had warned him there was not a second to spare.

"Draw the rope tight and hold on like grim death," he cried. "I'm going down."

He had slipped over the edge of the cliff before he had finished speaking. The boys and Harvey braced themselves for the tug on the rope, their faces white and determined.

Bob's heart was beating like a triphammer. He wasted no time in the descent of the cliff. Slipping, sliding, he cared nothing for bruised muscles and torn flesh. Again and again sharp points of rock tore at him, brambles caught at his clothes and skin.

He found toe-holds in the crevices where he could, at other times he trusted solely to the rope.

His head swam whenever he looked downward. But he fought off the dizziness that assailed him. If the rope should break—but he turned his mind resolutely from that.

Several times he shouted encouragement.

"Hold on, old boy. I'm nearly there."

And Herb responded gamely:

"I'm holding. But the root is loosening."

A downward glance told Bob that Herb was almost directly beneath him. The clump of bushes that had intercepted his fall and still held him in thorny fingers was loosening at the roots beneath his weight. With a thrill of horror Bob saw that only one root still clung to the dirt. Herb's life was hanging by a thread!

A sharp tug told him that he had reached the end of the rope. He could go no farther.

"Herb," he called sharply, "can you reach my foot?"

Herb twisted about desperately, but as he did so there came a rending sound. The bush had

broken free from the ground, the last root had given way.

As he felt his support going Herb made one last desperate, effort to save himself. He turned and grabbed at the face of the cliff.

He clawed at the jagged rocks with frenzied fingers and found a slight crevice at which he gripped with desperation. Bob's foot dangled an inch above his head.

"Grab me, Herb! Grab me!" Bob implored, straining to reach a fraction lower.

Herb put forth all his strength in a gallant effort. He reached upward, caught something, hung to it frantically—Bob's ankle.

"All right now, old boy," came Bob's voice. "You're safe now. Catch hold with the other hand."

Both hands were now holding on with a death grip.

Then began a nightmare ascent.

Those at the top had sensed by the added weight that two now were at the end of the rope instead of one. They had to trust to that alone, for they could not look over the edge of the cliff, all their energies being devoted to holding on to the rope, bending back as far as they could, their feet braced against the rocks in the road.

Bob knew that his friends above could not pull him and Herb up by sheer strength alone. They

had all they could do to support the weight.

Herb could do little to help. His hands were holding on to Bob's ankle. Where he could, his swinging feet sought toe-holds in the side of the cliff and thus lightened his weight a little.

But on Bob devolved the most of the work. Could he win through to safety? Could Herb, already badly shaken by his fall, hold on? Would the rope stand the strain?

His lungs felt as though they were bursting. His breath came in short and labored gasps. His muscles felt as though they were being torn apart. His head was swimming.

Could they make it?

They must make it!

Up they went, inch by inch, foot by foot. They were almost at the top now. If they could only hold out a few minutes longer, a few seconds longer!

Bob's head appeared above the trail. His hands clawed at it avidly. Eager hands gripped his wrists, pulled him up, grasped Herb and yanked him up on the road. They were safe. Safe! By almost a miracle they had been torn from the jaws of death!

None of the rescuers could speak coherently. They hovered about Bob and Herb, chafing them, rubbing them, bathing their faces with water.

It was a long time that the two boys lay there,

bruised and aching in body but their spirits at peace. Death had glared at them, but passed by. They could even now almost hear the whirring of his wings.

But their youth and vitality had vast recuperative powers, and before long Bob raised himself on his elbow and looked at Herb.

"So you're all there, old boy," he grinned. "That sure was a close shave."

Herb laughed queerly.

"It was," he agreed. "I've never been so close to death before. And I never want to be again. How's your leg, old boy? I was afraid I'd pull it clear out of the socket."

"Don't worry about that," returned Bob. "Just now it's groaning a bit. But what's a leg or two between friends, anyway?"

"It meant a lot to me a few minutes ago," Herb responded. "I hate to think what would have happened, if I'd missed my clutch at that old ankle, Bob."

"Don't let's think of what might have happened," the radio man said. "Bob did a gallant thing when he went over the edge of that cliff after you, Herb, my boy, for he never knew whether he would come back alive or not. The chances were ten to one that he wouldn't, but he took the chance all the same."

"Oh, that wasn't anything," protested Bob.

"It wasn't much of a chance to take with that rope under my arms. Herb was the one that took all the chances."

"I took them because I had to," replied Herb. "You took them because you chose to. There's a heap of difference. I'll never forget it, Bob."

"Well, you're both safe now, and that's the main thing," remarked Brandon. "And now I suggest that we get along the trail as fast as possible. Somehow, I don't like the view from here."

"I don't like it much myself," grinned Herb. "Or perhaps it's only because I've had too much of it."

The pintos had stood with stoical indifference during the progress of these exciting events, and made no objection now when the boys mounted them.

Bob was glad that he did not have to walk, for his leg hurt him cruelly. He was cut and bruised in many places, and there were several long rents in jacket and knickers.

"Here's hoping we don't meet with any more rattlesnakes!" remarked Joe, and Herb grinned wryly.

"If any one says rattlesnake to me, I'll push him off the trail," he threatened. "I hope I'll never see any more of those pesky critters as long as I live."

"You'll see more than one while you're in this district," warned Brandon. "That one you met was what they call a sidewinder. They make their home in the openings of the rocks on the side of the mountain and they're liable to appear at any time. That first one had come out to bask in the sun when we came along. Keep your eyes open."

It is needless to say that the advice was heeded. But no other of the deadly reptiles appeared in the path, though once Bob caught a glimpse of a malignant head thrust out from a crevice high above the road.

The trail widened shortly, and for a little distance it led down hill. The boys drew a breath of relief as they left behind them the canyon with its unpleasant associations.

They traveled for a considerable distance after that along bad roads, some of which scarcely deserved to be dignified by that name.

The day, so cool and crisp in the early morning, was growing hot. The boys began to seek the shade wherever possible and dread the open places where the sun beat ruthlessly down upon them.

"Say, I'm hungry," Jimmy exploded at last. "It's been growing on me for the last hour. When do we eat? That's the question before the house."

Brandon Harvey, riding as usual a little in advance, overheard the query and glanced back. He reined in his pony and waited for the boys to come up with him.

Then he pointed with his quirt through the trees.

"See that glimmer of water over there?" he said. "I have a notion that's where we eat, boys. How about it, Jimmy?"

"That saves my life," laughed Jimmy.

"A stream!" cried Herb. "Maybe we can catch some fish and cook them for dinner."

"Perhaps we can," replied Brandon. "Let's go."

They pushed forward eagerly.

CHAPTER X

THE SHOT

A FEW minutes later the Radio Boys and Brandon Harvey had driven their horses to the border of the stream.

It was an ideal place to make camp, and the stream, wide in places and growing deeper as it flowed downward, promised good fishing.

Bob and Joe unloaded the supplies and got out the fishing rods, while Herb and Jimmy led the horses to the edge of the stream.

When the animals had drunk, they were tethered to trees and allowed to graze, while the boys prepared for their fishing. Jimmy dug for worms and soon had a dozen or more good fat ones.

"This is the life!" caroled Joe, as they wandered upstream to find a favorable spot. "Make believe that poor Jesse Farmer wouldn't like to have our chance and be able to take advantage of it!"

"Wish he could," broke in Bob, suddenly

serious. "Wonder how the poor chap is getting along with the mike he's set his heart on inventing."

"Hope he makes something of it," observed Joe. "That's one branch of the radio where there could be considerable improvement. I'd like nothing better than to see Jesse come through with colors flying."

"Speaking of flying, did you see that fish over there," cried Herb, with the enthusiasm of a true angler. "It jumped right out of the water. Must have seen some especially luscious fly. Say, I'll bet this stream is chock full of fish!"

"Should have brought a net along, then," grinned Jimmy. "We would catch 'em faster."

They found that Herb's prophecy was true in the main, and the fish were so unused to human intrusion that they snapped at the bait recklessly. The boys were not long in gathering a good mess and returning in triumph to the camp.

Mr. Harvey had been busy in their absence and had accumulated a big pile of brush and wood, with which the boys set to work to light a fire.

The fish were cleaned, impaled on sharp sticks, and roasted over the flames. The fact that they were slightly blackened in the process spoiled neither their flavor nor the appetites of the banqueters.

They ate voraciously and then lay back for a

half hour of relaxation before resuming their journey.

Only Herb seemed to be restless. Joe noticed this.

"What's wrong, Herb?" he asked in a low voice.

"Nothing much," was the answer. "Speaking of Jesse put me in mind of my sister Agnes. I was wondering if she was over her accident and if they had found that twelve hundred dollars yet."

"I see. It was certainly some loss for her."

"It was. She had planned to do a lot with that money," sighed Herb.

After this there came a short time of complete silence.

It was Brandon Harvey who at last broke the spell and announced that they would better be getting on.

"I'd like to reach Gold Valley while the sun is still shining," he stated. "We want a chance to look about a bit before we settle down for the night."

Here the Radio Boys agreed with him. They were not in the least reluctant to take to the saddle again, since the end of the journey was so nearly in sight. The Duplex Mine held a strong lure for them, intensified to a great extent by the mysterious happenings of the last few days.

But as they pushed on they found the trail becoming more and more difficult. Now it led upward through masses of dnse undergrowth; now wound, rock-strewn, about the mountain side where a single misstep might mean death; and again descended so abruptly that the boys could see straight down into gorges over their horses heads.

"The miracle is that we can stay in the saddle," commented Bob, at a specially hazardous part of the trail.

"Just luck, probably," muttered Joe, wondering what would happen if his horse should slip.

After some hours of such travel in the blinding heat of the summer afternoon, they came to a ridge overlooking a valley.

"There it is!" exclaimed Brandon. "The place we've come thousands of miles to seek! That's Gold Valley!"

A buzz of exclamations came from the Radio Boys. Gold Valley! The magic words that had lured them on! What would they find there? What would they do there?

"We'll have the steepest descent of all to get there," Brandon said, arousing them from their trance. "But at least our goal is in sight."

"Looks absolutely deserted from here!" exclaimed Jimmy, in a tone that suggested disappointment.

"What did you expect?" gibed Herb. "All the stir and bustle of a great city?"

"The best we can hope for is that it *is* deserted—and will stay that way," observed Brandon dryly. "Well, boys, come on. Only a short way now."

But though the distance seemed short, it took them a long time to cover it, for the trail was exceedingly steep and rough. Here and there the undergrowth encroached so thickly as almost to obscure the narrow path, and their progress was considerably slowed down.

"Doesn't look as though many people passed this way," murmured Joe, after a particularly difficult stretch. "If I ever saw a wilderness, this is it."

"There are doubtless other trails into the valley, and if we'd brought a guide along, he could probably have chosen a better one," returned Brandon. "But a guide has a tongue, and that might not have done us any good. As long as we reach the place at last, it's all I ask."

They had come almost to the foot of that punishing trail when the path widened suddenly into a cleared space.

Bob's quick eyes detected ashes that had been left from fires and some old cans scattered about that had contained food.

"It's a camping place!" he cried. "Look at

those old cans! Some one has been here before."

The boys crowded their ponies close behind him. Brandon Harvey leaped from the saddle.

"It must be somewhere around here that my cousins had their shack," he said.

"And there it is, I'll bet!" exclaimed Joe, pointing to the right. "See that cabin there?"

"I guess you're right," assented Brandon. "Come along, boys, and let's look at what will probably be our home while we stay in Gold Valley."

The Radio Boys crowded curiously after their host as he pushed open the rude door of the cabin and went inside.

Like the first stopping place on their journey, the cabin consisted of a living room, a tiny storeroom and a lean-to at the back. The chief difference was that the main room was twice as large and much cleaner.

It was this cleanliness, in fact, that amazed them and brought with it some slight misgiving. Despite the presumption that it had been deserted for some time, it had a lived-in appearance. The floor was reasonably clean, the corners cobwebless, and the windows not so dirty but that they let in the light clearly.

Moreover, on further investigation, some shelves in the lean-to were found stocked

with a considerable quantity of canned goods.

"Of course, this stuff may have been left by Jim," Brandon said thoughtfully. "But I don't think so. He's been dead for months and the labels on these cans look comparatively fresh. It looks," he added, "as though some one had been here since Jim passed out. Now I wonder—"

He paused for a moment, his lips compressed and a fine line creasing his forehead.

"You're sure then that this cabin belonged to the twins?" asked Joe.

"Undoubtedly," returned the radio man. "The valley was uninhabited, except by them. And you can see by the weather marks on the cabin that it has been standing for a long time. No, there's no question but that this is part of my inheritance. But this comparatively fresh stock of goods—oh, well, we'll dismiss that question for the present," he concluded, with an impatient shake of the head.

"We aren't going to stop here now, are we?" asked Bob, eager for his first sight of the Duplex Mine. "We have plenty of time to explore before dark."

As Harvey was equally curious, he readily assented and after unloading the pintos and tethering them to graze, they started out in what their map told them was the right direction.

"That cabin will be pretty snug to park in between times," chortled Joe, in high spirits. "We ought to be able to make our aerials and set up our radio sets before long."

"Sure, we'll get to work on it to-morrow!" chimed in Jimmy. "Say, Herb, it was lucky that it was you and not the radio sets that tumbled over the cliff," he added, with a chuckle.

"If there was a cliff handy, you'd go over it right now," retorted Herb, and Jimmy prudently put Bob and oe between himself and the author of the threat.

A mountain wall loomed up before them, and Bob, as he ran his eye over it, halted abruptly.

"Look at that hole there," he called to the others. "Do you suppose its a cave?"

The boys were intent on finding out without delay. But, quick as they were in reaching the opening, Brandon Harvey was there before them.

"Looks like a cave, sure enough," judged Joe.

"It is—but not one made by Nature," returned Brandon. "Look here. This hole has been drilled through the solid rock. I believe it's one of the entrances to the Duplex Mine."

Bob bent to the ground and picked up something that looked at first glance like a queer-shaped, jagged stone.

"Look!" he said, and pointed to a thin, yellow

veining, almost as slender as a gossamer thread. "What do you make of that?"

Mr. Harvey took the piece of quartz and examined it with intent interest.

"Gold, without a doubt!" he exclaimed. "Maybe we haven't come on a wild goose chase after all!"

On fire with eagerness now, they scouted around, and Herb was rewarded by finding another opening around the side where the hill curved, but some hundreds of yards from the first.

"But why two openings?" asked Jimmy, quickly reaching his chum's side.

"They probably worked from both ends, thinking that if one didn't strike gold the other might," suggested Joe. "A pretty good idea, too, if you ask me."

Herb pulled a flashlight from his pocket and directed its beams into the opening.

"Come on, let's take a look. Maybe—" he began, then stopped aghast.

A rifle shot had shattered the stillness!

CHAPTER XI

FOES IN AMBUSH

THE first rifle shot was almost instantly followed by a second.

Joe jumped back from the mine entrance, startled.

"What was that?" he cried.

"Probably it was a hunter after game," suggested Jimmy.

Bob made a discovery. Mr. Harvey was not with them! He had probably lingered at the entrance of the other mine or gone off on some private exploration of his own.

For the first time those shots in the woods assumed a sinister aspect. But as the boys began running toward the first entrance, calling Mr. Harvey's name, Brandon himself stepped from behind some bushes, his hat in his hand.

"What's the row?" he greeted them, smiling.

"We heard the shot and thought perhaps you had been hurt," explained Bob.

"Must have been a hunter," said Herb reliev-

edly. "I suppose shots are not such a rare thing after all up in this neck of the woods. Game must be plenty."

"Possibly you're right," assented Brandon in an odd tone of voice. "But while we're talking about shots suppose you just take a look at the work of one of them."

So saying, he held out his sombrero.

Puzzled by his air, the boys examined the hat. In the crown, high up, was a bullet hole.

"Gee whillikens! That was a close shave!" cried Jimmy. "Were you wearing the hat at the time?"

"I was," replied Brandon grimly. "And now I think we'd better get out of here as soon as possible."

As he spoke, the boys thought they heard a soft rustle in the undergrowth at some distance away, a sinister rustle as though a snake were slipping along amid grasses.

Their instinct was to dive into the bushes and drive the enemy from cover. But Brandon's order was peremptory.

"Get out of this, quick!" he commanded. "Back to the cabin as fast as you can get there. We'll talk about this later."

The boys obeyed reluctantly, though they knew that Brandon's judgment was good. It was one thing to fight an enemy in the open and

quite another to dash in blindly while he shot from behind the shelter of trees or bushes.

Arriving at the cabin, they approached the door cautiously, half-expecting to be greeted by a fusillade.

Nothing untoward happened, however, and in a moment more they were safe inside the cabin with the door locked and bolted.

"Better see that the door to the lean-to is secured also," suggested Brandon.

Bob and Herb went into the shed at the back and propped a heavy joist against the door. When they returned Brandon had picked up his hat and was examining it carefully, while Joe and Jimmy bombarded him with questions.

"I think we're in for more excitement than we bargained for," Brandon was saying in response to one of these.

"You haven't told us yet where you were when it happened," said Bob. "I mean when you got the bullet hole through your hat."

"I was looking about a bit," explained Harvey. "I had gone east from the first mine opening while you boys turned to the west. I meant to follow you shortly, but I had found something that made me curious. This was the print of recent footsteps in the sandy ground at the foot of the hill."

He paused, while the eyes of the boys wandered

from him to the window and back again to him.

"You think that some one else had been at the mine a little while before?" asked Joe.

"Certainly looked like it," Mr. Harvey returned. "But what seemed to me queer, more than anything else, was that these footprints were not made by ordinary shoes. There was no imprint of a heel, for instance. The marks were flat and broad. They might have been made by sandals—perhaps by moccasins."

"Indians, maybe," suggested Herb.

"An Indian, perhaps," assented Brandon. "You remember I told you that Indians held an interest in the Duplex Mine before they were induced to sell out. But that was long before the twins came into the vicinity. The previous ownership by the Indians, however, may just possibly have something to do with what happened to-day."

"The plot thickens," interposed Jimmy.

"But what about the shots?" persisted Bob.

"I was bending over examining the footprint," replied Brandon, "when I heard it—the shot, not the footprint," with a faint smile. "It seemed so close at hand that I straightened up, startled. The next instant there was another shot. I heard something sing through the air and my hat fell off. I caught the hat as it fell, and then had enough presence of mind to dodge behind a big

rock near by. By that time I had my revolver out and ready for action."

"Did you see any one in the woods?" asked Herb.

"Not a soul. I might have thought I'd imagined the whole thing if it hadn't been for that bullet hole in the hat. I heard you boys call, dodged about the side of the hill, and met you a moment later. That's all I have to tell about my experience. Now, what do you boys make of it?"

"If the bullet was really intended for you, I suppose it means that you have some deadly enemy or enemies in this part of the country," said Bob soberly. "But isn't it possible the bullet was only a wild shot from some hunter's rifle?"

Mr. Harvey shook his head.

"If there had been only one shot, I might accept that explanation," he replied. "But the first bullet was too close for comfort, and the second—well, you can see for yourselves how close it came to ending my troubles forever."

"Some close shave, I'll say," commented Joe.

"Listen, boys. Perhaps it would be better for you to go back home and let me fight this out alone," continued the radio man.

"No, sir!"

"Not on your life!"

"We came to find the mine, and we are going to do it."

"We'll stick to the end."

Thus spoke each of the Radio Boys. Brandon Harvey looked at them in admiration.

"But in danger——"

"We are willing to share it with you," cried Jimmy.

"But one or more of you may get shot!"

The Radio Boys were silent for a moment, considering this serious angle of their adventure. Then Herb gave a short laugh that had no mirth in it.

"It's going to be pretty tough work looking for gold with snipers taking potshots at you from behind the bushes," he said.

"What you might call mining under difficulties," Brandon agreed. "However, the experience of the afternoon may not be repeated. Some one may have taken a chance of picking me off, but may not venture to try it again now that he knows I am on my guard. I'll exercise the utmost caution, but go right ahead with my prospecting. A bold front is often the best defense. But you boys——"

"I'm going to stick," said each of the boys in turn.

Harvey regarded the boys thoughtfully.

"All right, then," he said. "I think, however,

that until our position here seems a little more secure we had better unpack as little as possible. We want to be ready to make a quick move, if a quick move becomes necessary."

"We were figuring on putting up an aerial and getting our radio sets in shape," said Bob regretfully.

"I hardly think it would be wise, unless you are prepared to abandon the sets under certain circumstances," replied Brandon. "For my part, I would rather wait until we find a solution of the mystery that appears to surround my unfortunate inheritance. Possibly, after all our trouble," he added with a whimsical smile, "we'll find there's not enough real ore in the mine to justify working it."

"That bit of quartz this afternoon looked good," observed Joe.

"It did," admitted the radio man. "Let's hope there's plenty more like it. And now, how about supper? I imagine we can do enough unpacking to get some beans and bacon. Come on, boys, let's build a fire. Enemies or no enemies, we've got to keep up our strength."

They went about the work of preparing supper with a will. But as darkness settled down upon the woods the boys draped the two staring windows of the shack with blankets. If the author of that shot through Brandon's hat was the poten-

tial murderer he seemed to be, they had no intention of offering themselves as targets for his gun.

Each doing guard duty for a set period, they spent an uneasy, restless night and were glad when daylight ended suspense and cleared the way for action.

After a hurried breakfast they started on foot for the mine, first having watered the horses and lengthened their tethers so that they would have plenty of room to graze.

"By good rights I suppose some one ought to be left to watch the horses," Joe suggested. "Sometime we may come back to find them missing. The same trick may be played that was tried the other night."

Mr. Harvey pondered the matter.

"I don't want to leave any one alone here," he said thoughtfully. "Besides, the conditions are different now. The other night they wanted to keep us from getting here. Now they're probably anxious we should get away from here, and we couldn't do it very well without the horses. I guess we'll take a chance. Every once in a while we'll come back to see that things are all right."

CHAPTER XII

INTO SPACE

BRANDON HARVEY and the Radio Boys went as quickly as they could to the first opening of the mine. Their nerves were strung to high tension. Behind any tree or bush might be some dusky, high-cheekboned face, and more than once they imagined that they heard the stealthy padding of moccasined feet behind them.

However, they reached the mine entrance without mishap and their confidence increased proportionately.

"Tell you what let's do," suggested Bob. "Two of us will explore this opening while the others have a look at the other one. In about an hour we'll meet and compare notes. How about it?" he asked of Brandon Harvey.

The suggestion was received with favor, and it was decided that Brandon, Bob and Herb should explore the second opening, leaving Joe and Jimmy to try their luck in the first.

All of them had pocket torches with strong

lights, and they had put new batteries in them before setting out.

While their comrades were skirting the hillside toward the second entrance Joe and Jimmy worked their way cautiously into the yawning mouth of the first opening.

The light from without penetrated only a little way, and it grew momentarily darker inside.

"Get our your torch, Jimmy," said Joe, setting the example with his own.

There was a momentary pause while Jimmy obeyed orders.

"I don't see any gold," remarked Joe, as his light flashed over the floor and sides of the tunnel.

They moved along slowly. Three minutes passed and then Jimmy gave a gasp of surprise and alarm.

The ground had fallen away beneath his feet!

The sensation of falling through space in the darkness was the most horrible that Jimmy had ever experienced. He yelled but once, and then came to earth with a loud thump that seemed to jar loose every tooth in his head.

He heard a second thump and a muttered exclamation in a voice which he knew.

Jimmy stretched out a tentative hand. His fingers came in contact with somebody's jacket.

"That you, Joe?" he asked in a shaking tone.

"Don't know yet," growled Joe. "Wait till I find out if I'm all here."

There was a brief silence as the boys felt themselves all over to see if their limbs and trunks were in good working order.

"Where's your torch?" asked Jimmy.

The question seemed to irritate Joe out of all proportion.

"You're like the woman who asked her husband whether he'd smashed the pitcher when he fell down the cellar stairs," he snapped. "Where's my torch? How do I know where my torch is? It fell out of my hand when we dropped through that rotten hole there. Probably smashed into a million pieces."

"Well, that's that," sighed Jimmy. "But others have had the same experience. Where was Moses when the light went out?"

"You don't seem to realize, Doughnuts, that we're in a mighty tight fix. Have you any idea what we fell through?"

"Sure, a hole," snickered Jimmy, with unjustified levity. "The question is," he continued, "not how we got here but how we're going to get out?"

"Yeah. That's the question," growled Joe, still grouchy. "Now suppose you answer it."

"Give me time," protested Jimmy, as he rose slowly and painfully to his feet. "I'll tell you

one thing, Joe, old boy: That was a fierce jolt I got and I hope you got the same—that is, I hope you didn't. Say," with a groan, as he tried to straighten up, "I think my back's broken!"

"Your tongue still seems to be in good working order," said Joe with elaborate sarcasm. "We may find ourselves with something worse than a broken back, if we don't get out of this dump pretty soon."

"There isn't anything worse," retorted Jimmy. "It all comes of trying to look for gold in the ceiling and not looking where we were going," he complained, as he moved slowly about feeling for something solid in the darkness. "If you'd kept the flash on the floor, we'd have seen the opening."

"Sure! That's right. Blame it on me," returned Joe. "Where's your own light?" He got to his feet and began to stumble after Jimmy in the dark. "There may not have been any hole—just a weak place in the flooring of the tunnel ready to cave in anyway. We had the bad luck to step on it, that's all."

"It was a hole, all right," affirmed Jimmy. "One minute I was walking on solid earth. The next my foot went over the edge of something and I felt myself falling. But listen, Joe, maybe we can get out the same way we came in. Climb up, I mean."

"I've thought of that," replied Joe. "But the roof of this tunnel, or whatever it is we've fallen into, seems to be some distance overhead. If we had a light now and could locate the hole, we might manage to get through it. Let's feel around and see if there's any ladder or holes in the wall where we can use our hands and feet."

But they could detect none of these aids. On three sides there was empty space. On the fourth they came up against a wall of earth, but it was soft and crumbling and seemed to slant inward as it ascended.

"Only a fly could climb that," pronounced Jimmy. "I guess we'll just have to grope our way along on a chance and see if we can't find some way out of this place."

They started out, but they were bruised and sore all over, and this made their progress slow. Moreover they found firm ground for each foot before they put another forward. They were not anxious for any more falls, and their groping fingers had failed to find the lost electric torches.

As cautiously as cats, they felt their way through the thick gloom of the tunnel. The air was fetid and stifling. Occasionally their hands came in contact with a wall, wet with slimy ooze. They stumbled again and again over rocks in

their path. Once Joe went to his knees with a cry of pain.

"Hurt yourself, Joe?" asked Jimmy solicitously, as he reached out a hand to help him.

"Got my ankle that time," Joe said. "Sprained it a bit, I guess. Didn't have enough already."

How long they wandered aimlessly about they could not tell, for they lost all count of time. But at last sheer weariness compelled them to slump down on the floor and rest.

"How's the ankle, Joe?" asked Jimmy. "Still hurt?"

"A little," replied Joe briefly.

They sat for some minutes, each busy with his thoughts, and those thoughts were extremely grave ones.

At last Joe struggled painfully to his feet.

"There must be an end to this tunnel somewhere," he assured himself and Jimmy. "We've got to find it, Jimmy!"

"Yes," agreed Jimmy. "We've just got to find it!"

CHAPTER XIII

CAPTURED

MEANWHILE Brandon Harvey, Bob and Herb were having adventures of their own.

They had entered the mine at the second opening, and for some distance were shown their way by the light streaming in from the mouth of the cave.

Then the tunnel curved sharply and they were plunged into darkness. By a common impulse each drew his torch from his pocket. Three lights! How much a little while later Joe and Jimmy would have given for only one!

Brandon had brought with him a small hammer, and with this he tapped the walls at intervals to estimate their thickness.

"Gold!" he remarked musingly. "I wonder if we shall find any. Jim intimated in his will that the mine was immensely valuable. That means either that he was mistaken or that Grimshaw's crooked. I prefer to believe," with a

smile, "that Grimshaw's crooked. Hello, what's this?"

The exclamation was caused by the abrupt slanting downward of the floor of the tunnel.

"Looks as if we were going down into the bowels of the earth," remarked Bob, with lively interest.

"Must have taken a lot of work and engineering to dig so far into the mountain," put in Herb.

"A good deal of the digging was done by the Indians, you know, before the mine was bought from them," Brandon reminded them. "Pretty soft for the twins, at that. I've often wondered," he continued thoughtfully, "if the Indians got a square deal in the transaction. It's generally easy to cheat redskins, and the white man is not above doing it, as history proves."

He had been tapping with his hammer again. Now he paused and listened intently.

"Boys," he said in an odd tone, "do you hear anything?"

The boys listened breathlessly, and to them, faint but unmistakable, came the dull, reverberating sound of pickaxes striking upon rock. They stared at each other while the astounding fact gripped their minds.

Some one had got there before them! Somebody else was working the mine—the mine that belonged to Brandon Harvey!

In an instant other hitherto vague and formless suspicions were merged into certainty.

Grimshaw had had his reasons for declaring the mine worthless. Staley, Grimshaw's friend, had been sent to discourage any invasion of Gold Valley by the rightful proprietor of the Duplex Mine. And now, despite all warnings, they had arrived and found some one working the mine!

There was no longer any doubt in their minds as to the meaning of that shot the afternoon before. The bullet had been no accident. It had been aimed with deliberate intent to kill!

Mr. Harvey's first reaction was that of fury. He started running, but brought up short a few paces further on.

"What are you going to do?" asked Bob.

"Find out who's working my mine!" replied Brandon angrily. "I shouldn't wonder if I'd find our friend Grimshaw at the end of this tunnel."

They proceeded as swiftly as they could, while making as little noise as possible.

Now and then they halted, listening intently. The sounds grew steadily louder and louder.

"We're on the right track!" exclaimed Bob excitedly.

"The hammering seems to be to the left of us," said Herb.

"Yes, and we can't go any farther along this

tunnel," said Brandon Harvey. "Look here!"

He threw the light of his torch directly in front of them and the two boys saw to their chagrin that they were facing a blank wall with no sign of an opening anywhere.

In exasperation Mr. Harvey raised his voice and shouted:

"Who's there?"

The boys added their voices, and for a few moments the tunnel reverberated to their shouts.

The sounds died away, to be succeeded by sheer silence. Silence not only on their part, but on the other side of the wall. The sound of the pickaxes had ceased.

"They've heard us," judged Bob.

"Perhaps we've scared them off," added Herb.

All unknowing of these happenings, Joe and Jimmy were moving slowly along the underground passageway into which they had been precipitated in so startling a manner.

For a long time there was no glimmer of light to relieve the gloom. Then Joe realized that the darkness was not so profound as it had been. He could discern the figure of Jimmy plodding along beside him. Light must be coming from somewhere.

Jimmy made the discovery about the same time. They paused for a moment's excited consultation.

"Perhaps," suggested Jimmy, in a voice vibrant with renewed hope, "we may be coming to a third hole in the hillside that we haven't yet seen."

"We'll have to go on a bit farther to find out," said Joe. "But we'd better be careful. I have a hunch that some things may be going on here that we don't understand."

They found a few feet farther on that the tunnel branched. It was not difficult to tell which passage to take, for it was down one of these that the light was filtering. They saw now that it was artificial light and seemed as though it might be caused by the flare of torches.

"Can't be Mr. Harvey and the boys," said Joe, in a tone that he instinctively subdued to a whisper.

Jimmy shook his head.

"Listen!" he said.

They strained their ears and could distinctly hear the metallic clang of tools against rock.

"That can't be our crowd," whispered Joe. "They didn't have any tools with them."

"Who is it then?" asked Jimmy excitedly.

"How can I tell?" responded Joe. "Come along and let's find out. Gee, won't I be glad to get out of this hole!"

This was natural but injudicious. Both boys were so eager to leave the black menace of the

tunnel behind them that they temporarily forgot caution. Before them were men, lights, deliverance as they thought. Behind them were darkness, possibly starvation or some other terrible form of death.

As the light grew stronger and the tunnel widened, the boys began to run. They came quickly to an open spot and were abruptly halted by the scene that met their eyes.

Indians! Eight or ten of them, plying picks and crowbars vigorously, their broad, bronzed faces etched in striking relief by the flaring torches.

With a shock Joe and Jimmy realized the truth. Indians, probably at the instigation of white men, were working Mr. Harvey's mine! They had stumbled into the heart of the Gold Valley mystery!

Instantly they realized their danger, but they were too late. Two of the Indians dropped their tools and leaped toward them. The boys turned and ran stumblingly into the dark passage.

They had a sickening conviction that escape was hopeless, yet ran on until the redskins were upon them. Then they turned and battered at their foes with their fists.

But the odds were overwhelming. Other Indians had followed the first two. A dozen hands

reached out for them. Threatening faces were thrust close to theirs.

Protesting, struggling, Jimmy and Joe were dragged out into the light.

"What do you think you're doing?" shouted Joe in frenzy. "You let us go or you'll be sorry."

A chorus of grunts was the only answer to the threat.

"Where you come from?" asked an Indian. He was six feet tall, broad and muscular, and seemed to be looked up to as the leader of the group.

When neither of the boys answered the question the Indian stepped forward and prodded Jimmy in the ribs.

"Where you come from?" he repeated, and this time there was menace in his tone.

"None of your business," snapped Jimmy, who forgot for the moment that discretion was the better part of valor.

"Sure our business," grunted the Indian, his face darkening. "You answer. How you get here?"

"We fell through a hole into the tunnel," replied Joe. He reasoned that there was nothing to be gained by antagonizing their captors, and argued that the truth could not hurt them. "We followed along a while in the dark until we saw

your light. We thought we were coming among friends."

"And now that you know all about us," put in Jimmy, who was still in a rage, "perhaps you'll tell us what *you're* doing here."

The Indians scowled and their leader took a threatening step toward Jimmy.

"Shut mouth!" he commanded fiercely. "You too much talk!"

He turned aside and muttered a command to his followers in a tongue the boys did not understand.

The redskins grabbed the boys and threw them roughly to the ground. There they were held, struggling and raging, while their hands were bound securely behind their backs.

Now they were prisoners in earnest!

"You'll get all that's coming to you for this," shouted Jimmy, struggling until the cords bit cruelly into his wrists. "If you think you are going to put over a raw deal of this kind—"

His protest was rudely stifled by a big hand placed over his mouth. Stooping down, the chief of the band jerked the boys to their feet. He gestured to his scowling companions and said:

"We put them where they not make big talk any more. Then we must work."

Joe and Jimmy exchanged doleful glances.

"Looks as though we were up against it good and hard," murmured Jimmy.

Joe frowned.

"If there were only some way we could get word to Mr. Harvey and the fellows, we'd—"

But he was not permitted to finish the sentence. Rough hands yanked him away, and he was pushed down a dark, narrow passageway. He could hear that Jimmy was being dragged after him.

Only two of the Indians were sent with them. The rest remained at work in the mine. The boys again heard the sound of their picks and crowbars as the passage before them widened and the blessed sunlight poured in through a narrow opening at the end of it.

They cherished some wild hope of being able to break away when they should reach the outer air. But their captors kept a tight grip on them. Bound as they were, resistance was impossible. They must submit for the present and hope that help would come and come quickly.

They had gone but a little distance in the outer air when their captors pushed aside a dense thicket of bushes and disclosed the yawning mouth of a cave.

Into this the boys were thrust. They were dragged back some distance from the opening and their ankles bound together. This done, the

Indians straightened and looked down contemptuously at their captives.

"White man keep out of Gold Valley," snarled the shorter of the two. "Gold Valley bad medicine for the white man. Now you stay here till chief come."

With that they withdrew, and the boys lay still until the sound of the retreating footsteps died away in the distance. Then Jimmy spoke ruefully.

"We're sure in a tight fix, Joe. What do you suppose those Indians mean to do to us?"

"What they've already done is plenty," growled Joe. "Let's see if we can get these ropes loosened somehow."

But the Indians had done their work well. The cords were bound so tightly that the slightest movement caused them to bite into the flesh. The boys worked until the pain became intolerable and then decided there was nothing to gain by torturing themselves.

"We'll just have to wait, that's all," Joe reluctantly concluded. "When we don't show up at the cabin the fellows and Mr. Harvey will start looking for us."

"If they don't fall into the hands of the Indians too," said Jimmy dejectedly.

CHAPTER XIV

LOST UNDERGROUND

THE comrades of whom Joe Atwood and Jimmy Plummer were speaking had in the meanwhile turned back from the blank wall that had barred their way and were retracing the path toward the opening on the hillside. They had not gone far before they again heard the clinking of the picks, only this time it seemed louder and nearer than before.

"They're at it again!" exclaimed Brandon, his fist clenching involuntarily. "If we could only find the passage that leads to these outlaw workers. There must be one somewhere."

"Here it is!" Bob called out excitedly. "I don't know how we came to miss it before."

He had discerned a small opening into a passage at the side that they had previously overlooked. They followed this passageway eagerly, hoping that they had at last hit on something that would furnish a clue to the mystery.

They were sure that they were on the right

track, for with every step the sound of tools became more distinct.

Suddenly Mr. Harvey snapped off the light of his torch.

"Be mighty careful," he whispered to his companions. "Something is likely to break now at any moment."

He had hardly spoken when a sudden turn in the passage brought them almost upon the workmen.

They shrank back, hugging the walls of the tunnel. With a dozen Indians in sight, this was no time to show themselves until they had gauged the situation more thoroughly.

They watched for a few moments while the picks fell steadily, cutting into the heart of the rock from which great lumps fell from time to time. The Indians worked stoically without looking to the right or left of them.

Suddenly a tall, powerful fellow turned toward the passage. He dropped his pick and leaned upon the handle of it while his eyes searched the shadows beyond the light flung by the torches.

Brandon Harvey and the boys shrank back against the dark wall of the tunnel, trying to make themselves a part of it.

The Indian hesitated, shook his head, and then made a step or two in their direction; then, as though convinced that he had heard nothing

after all, grasped his pick and resumed work.

At once the whites began to back quietly down the narrow passage. As they reached what seemed to be the main tunnel, Herb turned eagerly to Brandon Harvey.

"What do you suppose—" he began.

But Brandon raised a cautioning hand.

"Wait till we're outside," he warned. "I have a curious feeling that these walls have ears, and considering the odds against us there's no use taking unnecessary chances."

Aided by the light from their torches, they made their way rapidly to the mouth of the tunnel and a moment later stepped out into the peaceful atmosphere of the woods.

"What are we going to do?" asked Bob, now that the injunction to silence was released. "Those Indians are working your claim without your authority. You're going to drive them off, aren't you?"

"To be sure I am," replied Harvey, with a determined set to his jaw. "But first of all I think we ought to search for Joe and Jimmy and give them a word of warning. After yesterday's 'accident' and the hole in my hat I'd hate to have them fall in with those Indians. They're probably a lawless bunch, and I imagine they would commit almost any crime now to avoid being interrupted in their plans—or rather the plans of

the white reprobates who are probably at the bottom of this whole business."

"Let's get after Joe and Jimmy right away then and put them wise," suggested Herb.

By this time they had reached the other entrance to the mine. Flinging the light of their torches before them, they went one by one into the opening.

More lucky, or perhaps more careful, than their predecessors, they detected the hole that had been their comrades' undoing. They skirted the edge of the drop and pursued their path with ever quickening steps as their anxiety grew.

They detected a maze of passages leading from their tunnel on both sides, and after exploring several of them in the hope that one might put them on the track of the missing boys, they paused in perplexity and looked at each other.

"While we've been doing all this searching and getting nowhere," remarked Brandon, "the boys have probably returned to the cabin and in their turn are looking for us. I vote that we go back and find if I am right. If not we'll come back here again." This sounded like sense to the boys and they willingly agreed.

But, to their surprise, upon retracing their steps to what they thought was the main tunnel, they were unable to find it! Instead, they found them-

selves in a passage that was thoroughly unfamiliar.

They tried a passage leading off from the one they were in and then another. Each only led to what seemed a bewildering network of underground passages.

In their various turnings they had lost all sense of direction, and though none of them cared to voice his opinion, each had the conviction borne upon him that he and his comrades were lost.

Nothing, however, was to be gained by standing still, and they tried and tried again in the hope, ever growing fainter, that they might strike the right passageway at last.

"Where do we go from here?" hummed Herb, with a feeble attempt at levity.

"Let's snap into it," counseled Brandon Harvey. "There certainly is a way out, and if we look long enough we're reasonably certain to hit on it. Listen for the sound of the picks. I didn't like that sound before, but it would be mighty welcome now."

But the end of two hours found them as hopelessly lost as ever. Of course, they had to move around slowly, because of the many jagged rocks and unexpected pitfalls.

"It's getting mighty late," said Bob, pulling out his watch. "We've been hours in this hole."

"And from the looks of things, we're likely

to be some hours more," put in Herb wryly.

Bob laughed shortly.

"It's funny in a way," he said. "We start out to look for Joe and Jimmy and get lost ourselves."

"Well," grumbled Herb, "if that's your idea of humor, go ahead and laugh."

"No use getting disheartened," said Brandon with forced cheerfulness. "We'll find an outlet yet, if we keep on trying. An hour from now we may be laughing at ourselves for all our useless worry. We'll get out, never fear."

"If we don't starve to death first," grunted Herb. "It's a long time since we ate, all right."

Again long hours wore themselves away, with the party crawling wearily through the maze of underground passages, embarking on each new one with a thrill of hope only to meet with further discouragement.

By their watches it was five o'clock. They were tired and tormented by hunger and thirst.

But a more immediate danger threatened them. For some time past their torches had been growing dim. Their batteries were steadily weakening. They had not been charged with an idea of such steady use.

They noted the waning power of the lights and tried to conserve by using only one at a time. But even at that they knew the time was

coming, and coming swiftly, when the last flicker of the last torch would disappear. Then they would be in the dark, lost in this underground tomb. For that it might prove a tomb was something that ever loomed larger in their minds.

They no longer tried to conceal from themselves the desperate nature of their position.

When the light at last failed them they must stumble along blindly, feeling their way, until all strength deserted them, and then sink down to die like rats in a trap.

"The Indians could not have thought out a worse fate for us, if they'd caught us," murmured Herb. "We won't be able to interfere now with their operation of the mine."

"We're far from being dead men yet," Bob encouraged him. "Let's keep a stiff upper lip. I'm sure there are a few hundreds of these passages that we haven't tried yet," he tried to joke.

They went on gamely, feeling their way part of the time, only flashing the single light at intervals. Herb's torch first gave out. A few minutes later, when Bob pressed the button of his torch, no flash responded.

"My light's gone!" he exclaimed. "That makes two of them. How much juice have you got in yours, Mr. Harvey?"

"Not much," responded Brandon. "I'm afraid this one is on it's last legs."

The grim prophecy proved correct, for a few minutes later it gave a last flicker and went out.

"One, two, three, out!" ejaculated Herb. "That puts us on the rocks for fair."

Darkness settled down on them like a blanket. They could not even see each other's faces. But in movement lay their only chance of life. So they pushed on, though necessarily more slowly.

Herb caught his foot beneath a rock and fell headlong. His head struck against something. He raised a hand to his forehead, and felt a warm trickle of blood that ran down the side of his face.

Bob reached him, almost fell over him.

"Herb! That you?" he gasped. "What's the matter, old boy?"

"Hit my head. Nothing much, I guess. Too many rocks in this place, anyway."

Bob helped his comrade to his feet, and Herb stood for a moment, swaying dizzily.

Bob drew out a handkerchief and put it to the cut on his friend's forehead. It was bleeding copiously, and in a moment the cloth was saturated.

Bob groped about Herb's head until he located the wound. Then he took his chum's handkerchief and bound it tight.

"I'm all right," Herb insisted. "Let's go on.

Someway or other, we've got to get out of this rotten hole!"

But despite his grit he could not walk alone. His head swam, and only Bob's arm about his shoulders kept him from slipping to the ground.

"Steady!" cried Bob. "We'll make the grade all right. Only take it easy, old boy."

Their progress now was painfully slow. Herb was game, but his stumbling feet failed to obey his will. He was forced to sit down frequently, and he was possessed by a consuming thirst. There were moments when he would have given years of his life for a drink of water.

But he always got up again, and with Harvey and Bob assisting him, forced his weary feet onward.

"The poor fellow's all in!" exclaimed Bob agonizedly. "He can't go on much longer! He—"

A new tone came into his voice. It was surcharged with hope.

"Look! Look!" he cried. "At the end of the passage! It's light! Light! Light!"

CHAPTER XV

THE INDIAN SENTRY

Bob Layton's cry sent a thrill through his companions like an electric shock, galvanizing them into new life.

There, sure enough, was a faint ray of light that they knew was not that of a torch. It was daylight, the blessed daylight, sending to them a message of hope and cheer!

As they walked the light grew brighter, and ere long they could see that they were approaching a real opening amply large enough for them to squeeze themselves through.

A cry of delight broke from all three when a minute later they scrambled through the hole and emerged into the open air.

A little mountain stream was rippling over the rocks not far away, and hastening to this they threw themselves down on their faces and drank deep draughts of the cool, refreshing water.

For a few moments afterward they sat resting and pulling themselves together. They were

tired beyond description and their nerves had been strained almost to the breaking point. Bob was the first to speak.

"Now for hunting up Joe and Jimmy," he said, rising to his feet, while the others followed his example. "I'll bet those boys have been worried stiff over us. They're imagining all sorts of terrible things that may have happened to us."

"Right you are," agreed Brandon. "Probably the best thing for us to do is to make straight for the cabin. They're probably there, or, if they're not, they may have left a note that will give us some idea of the direction in which they've gone. Besides, Herb is about all in, and I want to give his head a careful dressing with the help of our medical kit."

"Oh, I'm all right," protested Herb stoutly.

"We'll see about that when we've had a chance to look you over," replied Brandon, as he led the way in the direction of the cabin.

As they came in sight of it they looked eagerly for some traces of their missing comrades. But absolute quiet brooded over the place, and when they pushed open the door a quick glance showed them that the place was untenanted.

"Things just exactly as we left them this morning," muttered Bob, as he looked around. "Not a sign that either of the fellows has been here since then."

Nor did a careful search of the place show any note left behind by their comrades. The emptiness of the cabin was depressing, and the uneasiness that all began to feel was added to by the fact that the daylight was rapidly deepening into dusk. Could anything have happened to Joe and Jimmy?

"Oh, well," said Brandon Harvey, affecting a cheerfulness that he was far from feeling, "they may turn up at any minute. Now, Herb, let me see that head of yours. We'll fix that up first, and then we'll go and hunt up the truants."

Brandon and Bob carefully washed and dressed the wound, which they found was deeper than they had expected. Herb grumbled that it was nothing to make such a fuss about, but his friends knew better. And Herb himself had to admit that the dressing and bandaging made him feel immensely better.

"Now," said Brandon, when this work was completed, "we'll rustle a bit of grub together and then Bob and I will go scouting for the boys."

"I'm going with you," declared Herb.

"No, you're not," stated Brandon, with decision. "In the first place, you're in no shape to do anything of the kind. Then again, one of us must stay in the cabin to keep an eye on it and the horses and to be here if Jimmy and Joe turn up while we're hunting for them. Bob and I

will cover as much territory as we can, keeping all the time within reach of each other. At the end of every hour we'll return to the cabin on the chance that the boys may have come in. You, Herb, will keep the door well barred. You'll have to keep a light going so that it may be a guide for the other boys and ourselves in the dark. But lie low yourself and keep out of range of the windows."

They ate swiftly, and then, with a parting word to Herb, Brandon and Bob started on their quest. Their hearts were oppressed with anxiety that grew greater with every moment that passed without sign or word from their comrades.

"What do you make of it?" asked Bob, as he and the radio man passed out of the zone of light that surrounded the cabin.

"One of three things," was the reply. "The boys may have been hunting for us and themselves got lost in the forest. That's a mighty easy thing to do in this wild country. Or they may have got into one of the passages of the tunnel, just as we did, and not been able to find their way out. Or they may—" he paused, as though he dreaded to give utterance to his thoughts.

"You mean that the Indians may have captured them?" asked Bob, in a voice he tried to keep steady.

"We've got to face the possibility of that," admitted Brandon Harvey gravely. "You know how nearly we stumbled on them. Perhaps Joe and Jimmy were not so lucky as we were in avoiding discovery."

The mere thought sent a cold chill creeping over Bob.

"What do you suppose the Indians would do to them if they have caught them?" he asked.

"I hate to think," replied Brandon Harvey. "At the best, they'd probably keep them for a while for bargaining purposes, offer to free them if I'd give up the mine and get out of the country. At the worst—well, the theory that dead men tell no tales would probably appeal to them. There's no use blinking the facts, and that's a possibility we've got to face. But there—there's no use in imagining the things that might happen. What we've got to do now is to find them or learn where they are. Now we'll spread out and beat the woods, calling out to each other from time to time so that we shan't get out of touch. Then in an hour, if nothing develops, we'll make our way back to the cabin to see if there's any news."

"How about letting off a few shots at intervals on the chance that the boys may hear them?" asked Bob.

"I've thought of that. But I'm afraid it's

too dangerous with all these Indians about."

The dusk now had been lost in absolute darkness. Bob and the radio man had to make their way most of the time by the sense of feeling, helped somewhat by an occasional flash from their torches, which they had replenished with new batteries during their hasty stay at the cabin.

Occasionally they called out to keep each advised of the location of the other, and also in the hope that the voices, modified though they were, might be heard by their missing comrades. Their progress was slow, and yet by dint of desperate exertions they had covered quite a circle of territory before the time came to return to the cabin.

Their hearts sank when they learned from Herb that nothing had been heard or seen by him of the boys. But they kept up a brave show of hope and after a few minutes' rest and some coffee that Herb had ready, started out again.

"We'll have a better chance this time," encouraged Brandon, "because the moon is about to rise. There's the rim of it now!" he exclaimed, as the queen of night appeared on the horizon.

This reinforcement heartened the two searchers mightily. To be sure, the bulk of the woods remained in deep shadow, but through openings at intervals the light sifted through and showed

them where they were going, and their progress was in consequence much more rapid.

About half an hour had elapsed when Bob heard a sharp, crackling sound to the right. He knew that the noise had not been made by Brandon Harvey, for he was on the other side of him. Nor did the noise sound as though it were made by some stealthy animal of the woods. Rather it sounded as though a twig had snapped under the pressure of a human foot.

Instantly Bob froze into the immobility of a statue. His eyes darted hither and thither, trying to locate the source of the sound. He saw nothing that enlightened him as to the cause of the sound.

A full minute he stood motionless. Then, dropping on his hands and knees, he began to creep in the direction from which the noise had come.

He had just forced his way through a dense bit of underbrush when he heard a distinct grunt. At the same moment came the scratching of a match.

As the light flared up it illumined momentarily the bronzed face of an Indian!

CHAPTER XVI

A SURPRISE ATTACK

THE Indian was leaning in an indolent attitude against a tree as he lighted his pipe. For the moment, he had stood the long rifle with which he was armed on a stump close by.

All this Bob's keen eyes took in swiftly while the match was burning. But he had seen more than that.

The flicker of the match had shown him the gaping hole of a cavern, near the entrance of which the redskin was standing.

That the man was keeping sentry watch was betokened by the way he picked up the weapon and began pacing to and fro, and that the cavern was the object of his watch was evident from the way he passed and repassed it as Bob looked. What or who was in that cavern?

As silently as a shadow Bob began to move backward, still on hands and knees. Most of the time he was shrouded by the deep gloom of the woods. When he came to the slightly more

open spaces where the moon sifted through the trees, he waited till the man's back was turned before he essayed to pass over it.

His one thought was to get back to Brandon Harvey before the latter should call out as he had been doing at intervals. He was on tenter-hooks now, dreading at every moment to hear that call, which would most certainly come to the ears of the Indian and put him on his guard.

But he restrained the strong impulse to hurry, and made caution his first aim, and not until he was perfectly sure that he was out of sight and sound of the man he knew almost instinctively was an enemy did he rise to his feet and hasten in the direction that he believed would lead him to his companion.

He was not a moment too soon, for Brandon had just opened his mouth to call when he felt Bob's hand on his arm with a grip like iron.

"Hush!" whispered Bob. "Don't make a sound!"

The call was stifled in Brandon's throat.

"What is it?" asked Brandon eagerly.

In hurried whispers Bob narrated what he had seen, while his companion listened eagerly.

"I have an idea that Joe and Jimmy are in that cave," Bob concluded.

"I think you're right," agreed Brandon

thoughtfully. "Although, of course, it may be that they're guarding gold that they've taken from the mine—my mine," he added, gritting his teeth.

The radio man paused for a moment, pondering deeply.

"This is what we'll do," he said at last. "We'll creep up as close as we can to the sentinel. If Joe and Jimmy are in that cave, the sound of their voices may come to us. I don't imagine the poor lads feel much like sleep, and they'll probably get what comfort they can by talking to each other. Once we're convinced they're in there we'll tackle the sentry and get them out."

"Of course we will," agreed Bob, his muscles tensing with the thrill of approaching combat. "But how?"

Brandon tapped his revolver significantly.

"But if you shoot, the noise may bring other Indians to the spot," objected Bob.

"It isn't the muzzle that's going to do the work," returned Brandon. "It's the butt."

"You mean you're going to try to knock him senseless?" asked Bob.

"Exactly," Brandon replied. "I shouldn't want to shoot for two reasons. I don't want to kill the man and I don't want to make any noise. I think that a tap with this little persuader will do the trick."

"I see."

"Now here's the plan," went on Brandon. "We'll get as close as we can to the sentinel. Once we're certain that Joe and Jimmy are inside the cave, we'll wait till the sentry turns his back to us and then leap on him. I'll give him a crack with the revolver butt while you make a grab for his rifle. Everything depends on our being as quick as cats. It must be the first blow that does the business."

"I'll do my part," promised Bob. "Let's go to it."

He led the way rapidly until he knew they were nearing the cavern. Then both dropped to hands and knees and wormed their way along until they came to the thicket from which Bob had discovered the sentry.

They could not see him at first for the shadow of the trees, but they could hear the soft tread of moccasined feet. Then, a moment later, he was visible in a gleam of moonlight as he came toward them.

Bob and the radio man lay like statues scarcely daring to breathe, and in the silence the movements of their own hearts sounded to them like drum beats. They noted with satisfaction that the sentry came close to the thicket before he turned to resume his monotonous task.

For several minutes they lay there, straining

their ears to catch some sound from the cavern that would betray human presence within.

At last their vigil was rewarded by hearing a voice that was undeniably Joe's. Bob's heart leaped to his throat and his eyes were moist. Good old Joe!

A moment later Jimmy was heard in answer. Those outside could not catch what was being said, but that was of no moment. Their friends were there!

Now that that was a certainty there was no time to be lost. At any moment some other Indian might come to relieve the sentry from duty.

The Indian was now at the farther end of his beat. Brandon nudged Bob to be ready and himself took a tight grip on the muzzle of his revolver.

The unsuspecting sentinel came on drowsily and mechanically, his feet shuffling, his rifle over his shoulder. Brandon and Bob had abandoned their kneeling posture and were on their feet, though squatting low near the ground.

The sentinel reached the thicket and turned to go back. And at that instant the pair leaped upon him!

Their attack had been timed to a nicety. As the Indian, alarmed by the rustle, turned with a grunt, Brandon's revolver butt crashed down on his head. At the same instant Bob wrenched

the rifle from his grasp. The man fell like a log and lay motionless.

"Hope we haven't killed him," whispered Bob in awe.

"Only stunned him, I think," replied Brandon. "Here, help me drag him into the shadows where we can gag him. Quick's the word!"

Together they drew the Indian to where the gloom was thickest and, knotting their handkerchiefs, thrust the rope thus made into the man's mouth, being careful to leave him sufficient room to breathe.

Then they drew him into the mouth of the cavern and, taking their torches from their pockets, flashed the light into the dark recess.

A howl of delight came from Joe and Jimmy as they recognized their rescuers. But Brandon, no less delighted than they, quelled them instantly.

"No noise," he warned, and they choked back the yells of rapture they wanted to utter.

Brandon and Bob got out their knives and cut the bonds of the captives. There was a medley of whispered questions and ejaculations as the reunited friends fairly hugged each other.

The newcomers rubbed the wrists and legs of the others until the circulation was established and they could move about freely.

"Now let's get away," counseled Brandon.

"This isn't a very healthy neighborhood just now. But first let's take a look at our red-skinned friend. I hope we haven't dealt too hardly with him."

He flashed his torch upon the Indian's face and was surprised to see that the man's eyes were open and regarding them stolidly.

"Had a harder skull than I feared," Brandon remarked. "I'm glad, for I'd have hated to kill him."

The Indian made gestures indicating that he wanted the gag to be taken from his mouth.

"Not just yet," remarked Brandon grimly, correctly interpreting the motion. "Here, boys, knot those cords together that you were tied with and give this fellow a taste of his own medicine."

The order was complied with, and in a trice the captive's hands and feet were securely bound.

"Now," said Brandon, as he took his revolver from his belt, "we'll get down to business."

A look of terror came into the Indian's eyes.

CHAPTER XVII

CLOSE ON THE TRAIL

THERE was no mistaking the cause of the Indian's terror. He felt sure that the white man was going to kill him. Why else had he drawn the revolver?

"Listen," said Brandon as he bent over the captive. "Do you want to live?"

The Indian eagerly nodded assent.

"Very well then," said Brandon. "You can live on one condition—that you tell me the truth in answer to every question I shall ask you. Do you understand me? And will you tell me?"

Again a vehement nod signifying "yes" to both questions.

Brandon rose to his feet.

"Bob," he directed, "take this fellow's rifle and stand guard at the mouth of the cave. If you hear the slightest suspicious sound, let me know at once. You boys," he turned to the others, "take the gag out of this man's mouth and prop him up with his back to the wall while

I question him. But leave his limbs tied just as they are."

While the boys were busy following his directions, Brandon stood in deep thought revolving the situation. He knew the value of time, the danger of interruption, and was anxious to get away from the spot as soon as possible. But here was a chance of extracting information that might prove invaluable and might not offer itself again. It was worth the chance.

The gag had now been removed, and the prisoner's restless eyes wandered from one face to the other, but chiefly centered on Brandon Harvey and the revolver that he still held in his hand.

Brandon fixed him with a glance that bored him through and through.

"You say you want to live," he said sternly. "If you tell me the truth, you can. If you lie to me—" he broke off and handled the revolver significantly.

"I will tell the truth," replied the Indian in fairly good English, gained no doubt at a reservation school.

"First," said Brandon, "tell me whether you expect any other Indian here to-night to relieve you. No tricks now! Tell me."

"There will not be any one here till morning," was the reply. "It is my work to watch here all night."

"How many Indians are working in the mine?" asked Brandon.

"About twenty," answered the captive.

This was something of a shock. From what they had seen that day Brandon had figured on about a dozen.

"Why are they here at all?" asked Brandon sharply. "The mine belongs to me. What right have you to be working in it?"

"It used to belong—by rights, it does belong to men of our tribe," answered the Indian, with the first touch of resentment he had yet shown.

"But that was a long time ago," returned Brandon, ignoring the amended statement. "Since that time your people have sold it to the white man."

"White man cheated. White man lied," replied the man sullenly. "Indian not know much, white man smart. Get the mine away from my people for beads and calico and firewater."

"That may have been true a long time ago," answered Brandon. "But since that time it has passed through many hands and been bought by honest men who paid real money for it. But we haven't time to talk about that now. What made your people come over here all of a sudden to work in that mine?"

"They wanted to come," was the reply.

"What white man told them to come?" Brandon shot at him suddenly.

The question took the man by surprise and he twisted about uneasily.

"They came themselves," he repeated, but his eyes failed to meet those of his inquisitor.

Brandon poked his revolver into the prisoner's ribs.

"Quick!" he snapped. "Tell me the truth. I know Indians, and I know that they wouldn't undertake anything of this kind except under the leadership of a white man. Some one put them up to this, didn't he? Tell me," and his index finger reached for the trigger.

If there was a bluff in this, the Indian did not detect it, so stern and grim was Harvey's expression.

"Yes," replied the captive, cowed.

"I knew it!" declared Brandon. "Who was the man? Give me the name—or the names if there was more than one. Speak up!"

"Staley," muttered the man. "Grimshaw."

Exclamations broke from the lips of Joe and Jimmy. Staley! Grimshaw! In the light of what had already happened those names explained much.

"I thought so," remarked Brandon.

He took off his sombrero and pointed to the hole in the crown.

"Too straight shooting for an Indian," he observed. "Who made that hole?"

"Don't know," was the reply.

Again the revolver was leveled.

"Staley!" exclaimed the prisoner hastily.

"Just as I supposed," remarked Brandon. "Grimshaw is the brain behind this, and Staley is the thug he hires to do his dirty work. So these men are in the valley with you?"

The prisoner nodded assent.

"What did they promise you when you and the rest came over here?" pursued Brandon.

"They said they would give us half that came from the mine after you had been frightened away and given up the mine or sold it to them," replied the captive.

"And they would have cheated you just as soon as they got rid of me," commented Brandon. "Well," he went on, as he rose and thrust the revolver in his belt, "I guess I've learned all I want to know. It's been a pretty fruitful session, though I grudge the time it's taken. Now, boys, we'll gag this fellow again and put him in the back of the cave. If he's told us the truth about that sentry duty, it'll be a good many hours before his comrades find him. And by that time it's going to be mighty hard for them to find us."

They trussed the Indian up more securely than before and replaced the gag, first, however, for

humanity's sake, giving him a drink of water. Then they dragged the man to the rear of the cave, and, after they had satisfied themselves that escape of his own accord was impossible, left him there.

Hurrying to the mouth of the cave, they found Bob on vigilant guard, the rifle ready for instant action if occasion should arise.

They struck out straight for the cabin, where they found Herb in an agony of apprehension at their prolonged absence. His relief and delight at sight of Joe and Jimmy, safe and sound, were beyond description.

But there was little time for more than a hasty sketch of what had happened, for Brandon issued orders that they get ready to leave the cabin at once.

"This affair has brought things to a crisis," he explained by snatches, as they all got busy at packing. "By morning at latest they will have found that Indian and know that we're onto their game. They're dangerous men we're dealing with, and they'll try to see that we never leave this valley alive. With twenty or more against us, probably well armed, while we're only five and have no weapons except this revolver and rifle, we wouldn't have a ghost of a chance if it came to a scrap. That bullet hole through my hat shows how far they're prepared to go. We've

got to get reinforcements, and quickly. I have a plan in mind, but we haven't time to discuss it now. All of you lend a hand and work like beavers."

The boys needed no urging, and in an incredibly short time they had packed up all their belongings, collected the horses, and were ready to depart.

"Take special care in packing that radio sending set," counseled Brandon, as that precious possession was being placed on one of the pintos. "I have a feeling that that set may be our salvation. All ready? Let's go."

They extinguished the light and started off, with Brandon Harvey leading the way.

By this time the moon was shining brightly overhead and they had little difficulty in keeping the trail. Where it wound in deep shadow they simply gave the pintos their head and let them go, relying on the sagacity of the animals.

For a time they recognized the landmarks of the trail by which they had come into the valley. But after two hours of traveling they came to a place where another trail turned sharply to the right, and this one Brandon Harvey chose without hesitation.

The boys wondered, but asked no questions. In the first place, conversation was difficult with all of them strung out in Indian file and com-

pelled to give all their attention to the road.

Then, too, they saw that Harvey was deep in thought and they did not want to interrupt him. The boys had full confidence in their leader, and the way he had handled the matter of the sentry had strengthened that feeling. Wherever he went, they were content to follow.

For several hours they toiled through the night, until both they and their horses were drooping with weariness. But it was not till about two hours before daybreak that the radio man gave the signal to halt, as they came to a little glade through which a stream of water ran.

"We've got to give the animals a rest and take a little ourselves," he announced as he dismounted, an example the boys were glad to follow. "We'll stay here till dawn, and then we'll be on the move again."

They tethered the horses to near-by trees and threw themselves on the ground, weary beyond words. Harvey told the others to get what sleep they could while he himself stood watch. But the Radio Boys simply would not hear of this and finally compromised on the suggestion that Brandon should stay on guard one hour while one of the boys should take the next. All volunteered, but finally drew lots and the choice fell on Bob Layton.

At the end of the hour Brandon woke Bob and

himself turned in for a hurried snatch of sleep.

Bob was fearfully drowsy, and had all he could do to keep himself awake. To aid in this he studied with attention the rifle that had been taken from the Indian. It was a fine weapon of recent make, and Bob was capable of appreciating its fine points, for he was an excellent marksman and had carried off the highest honors on the high school rifle team.

The sun came up in the eastern sky and its rays shot across the little glade. Bob yawned and looked at his watch. It was the time at which he had promised to wake Brandon.

He walked toward the place where Brandon Harvey lay flat on his back. He was about to shout to him when he paused abruptly.

On his friend's body was something that looked like a coil of rope.

But it was not rope, for it moved.

Then Bob's blood seemed to freeze in his veins.

A huge rattlesnake lay on Brandon Harvey's breast!

CHAPTER XVIII

THE DEADLY RATTLER

At sight of the rattlesnake, Bob Layton for a moment was paralyzed with horror.

He realized what had happened. The reptile, with the instinct of its kind to seek warmth wherever it was offered, had sought refuge from the chilliness of the morning on the breast of the radio man. There it lay in snug content, its head, which Bob could not distinguish, sunk among its coils. And from the thickness of those coils Bob judged that it was a monster of its type.

Only for a moment did Bob's brain refuse to work. Then he shook off his stupefaction and his mind raced wildly, seeking a solution of his terrible problem.

He edged his way stealthily about among the trees until he was within fifteen feet of Brandon. His heart was beating like a triphammer. If only the radio man would keep on sleeping!

Suppose he should awake, yawn, stretch, make

the slightest movement! Bob knew that the snake would strike with the rapidity of lightning.

Even while this thought was filling him with terror Bob noticed something.

Brandon Harvey *was* awake!

Bob knew it by the slight fluttering of his lids, by the half-open eyes that were looking down at the awful burden of his chest.

What nerve it took for the man to do this, Bob could imagine. The twitching of a muscle would alarm and anger the monster. Then would come the dart of deadly fangs on face or throat.

Silently Bob rested his rifle on the edge of the stump behind which he was hiding. He drew a bead on that mass of ugly coils.

Yet even then he dared not fire. The last deviation of his aim might well send the bullet into Brandon's breast. Or, if this peril were avoided, he might simply wound the snake, which would instantly turn its rage on Harvey.

No, he must get a better target. He coughed. The reptile lazily raised its head and looked in the direction of the sound.

As that ugly head upreared Bob fired!

The bullet sped straight to the mark and shattered the snake's head into fragments. There was a hideous welter of blood and writhing coils and the headless body slid off the man's chest.

Dropping his rifle, Bob rushed to Brandon's

side. The latter was white and faint, but he essayed a smile.

"Good shooting, Bob," he muttered huskily. "I had given myself up as dead."

The other boys, alarmed by the shot, now joined them, and together they helped Brandon to his feet. But his knees sagged under him, and they seated him with his back to a tree while Joe hurried to the stream for water.

He had been under a terrific strain in that silent battle with death, and it was some time before he recovered his usual poise.

"Closest call I ever had," he remarked, as he looked with loathing at the dead body of the reptile.

"How long had you been awake before Bob shot it?" asked Jimmy.

"About five minutes, I guess," replied Brandon, "though it seemed about five hours."

"Gee, but it must have taken nerve not to move a muscle!" exclaimed Joe admiringly.

"I don't see how you did it," put in Herb. "It was enough to make your hair turn white."

"The worst of it was that I didn't see any way out of it," replied Brandon, with a shudder. "I was utterly powerless to help myself, and I didn't see how you could help me. I felt sure that when you saw my fix you'd make some exclamation or some movement that would anger the snake, and

then it would have been all up with me. I owe my life to Bob's caution and coolness."

"To say nothing of his marksmanship!" exclaimed Joe. "Gee, but that was a fancy shot!"

"I was only fifteen feet away and could scarcely miss," said Bob modestly.

"Easy enough to miss at five feet with such a swaying target," returned Brandon. "I shan't forget it, Bob. You're made me your debtor for life. But now let's get a snack to eat and hurry along. By this time the Indians may have discovered the sentry and be after us."

"Do you really think they'll follow us?" asked Bob. "Won't they be satisfied at having got rid of us and let it go at that?"

"I wish I could think so," replied Brandon. "Perhaps you may be right; but I imagine Grimshaw and Staley will worm out of the Indian what was said last night and they'll think that we know too much to let us get away. My own feeling is that they'll come after us. At any rate, we're going to act on that supposition."

"What place are you heading for?" asked Joe, voicing a question that had already been silently asked by all the boys. "Do you know of any hiding place in these mountains? Or are you going to try to make some town?"

"Two guesses and both wrong," replied Brandon, smiling. "I don't know of any special hid-

ing place, and there's no town we could reach before those fellows could overtake us. But I do know a place where an electric cable runs across the country, and I'm making for that."

"An electric cable!" exclaimed Joe, who did not for a moment seize the idea that Harvey had in mind.

"Yes," was the reply. "There's a big system operated by water power that generates electricity that is sent to towns and cities for a couple of hundred miles for light and heating. If we can once strike one of their electric lines—"

"I see!" cried Bob excitedly. "You want to get the juice from that to operate our sending sets."

"Right!" replied the radio man. "We'll send out a call for reinforcements. That call will be heard in a host of places, and I'm sure it will be promptly answered. Then, too, there's a military post somewhere in this region, and that's what I'm chiefly depending on. For when Uncle Sam's boys get on the job there'll be something doing in jig time.

"And now that we've had something to eat, let's get away, for I want to reach that electric line before sunset if I can. We haven't any time to lose, for already the Indians may be on our track."

They watched their steps narrowly as they got

the horses together, for they were by no means sure that the mate of the dead rattler was not in the vicinity. But if it was, it kept itself in hiding, and in a few minutes they had mounted and started on their day's journey.

The snatch of sleep that they had had, short as it was, had refreshed them, and as the trail at the outset was reasonably broad and not too steep, they made good time. But after the sun had fairly risen and begun to send out its flaming rays, the ponies lagged a little, and the members of the party began to experience real suffering.

At times they came to patches of woodland, and here the shade offered them a grateful respite. But these were few and far between, and for the most part they rode, parched and sweltering, beneath the pitiless, scorching sun.

They had replenished their supply of water at the stream in the glade where they had rested, but, nevertheless, at the leader's orders, they indulged in this sparingly, for there was no knowing when or where they could get more.

They stopped for a few minutes at noon to eat and let their horses breathe, and then resumed their journey.

All through the long afternoon they toiled on. They were weary and saddle sore, panting and drenched with perspiration. Their only comfort was that when they looked behind, as they did

frequently, they could see no sign of pursuers.

But as the afternoon was waning even that comfort was taken from them, for on one of these backward looks Brandon Harvey started and then halted abruptly.

Far off on the horizon they could discern a cloud of dust.

The boys had detected it almost as soon as their leader, and looked at each other inquiringly. In their hearts they had little doubt of what that dust cloud meant.

"The Indians, I guess," remarked Bob quietly, as his hand gripped more tightly the rifle he was carrying.

Brandon Harvey unslung a pair of fieldglasses from his shoulder and looked through them hard and long. Then he put the glasses back in place.

"Yes," he said, "the Indians. They're after us!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE CALL FOR HELP

BRANDON HARVEY'S words, though spoken calmly enough, sent a chill to his listeners' hearts. Their worst fears were realized. Pursuers were on their track!

"We've got to face the music, but it isn't as bad as it might be," said Brandon. "They can't catch up to us for a couple of hours, and darkness will be on us in an hour. In that darkness we may give them the slip. At any rate, we're not going to give up till the last gun's fired."

To say that their hearts were not apprehensive would be idle. They knew that they were dealing with ruthless men and that their liberty, probably their lives, hung in the balance.

But there was no panic terror. Every one of that little party came of good American stock, than which there is no more courageous in the world. If the worst came to the worst, they could be depended on to give a good account of themselves.

They urged their ponies on to the limit of their speed, and the plucky little beasts, jaded as they were, responded to the urging.

It was a race against time now, and glances were directed alternately at the darkening sky and at the pursuers, who, although it was evident that they were gaining, were still a good many miles in the rear.

Peering through the gathering dusk, Brandon Harvey gave vent to a cry of relief.

"The cable!" he exclaimed. "The electric wire! Thank goodness we've reached it at last!"

A thrill ran through the boys at the words. Here was their means of getting in touch with the outside world—the world of law and order and authority!

A few minutes more and they came to the line, which ran east and west as far as the eye could reach. Wherever possible, it was supported by poles, but at places where there were declivities and chasms it stretched from brink to brink fastened to rocks on either side of the ravine.

As they looked eagerly to right and left Brandon descried one such gully spanned by the wire. From some places on the sloping side of the gulch it was possible to reach the wire where it approached its fastening point at the end of the chasm.

Brandon's decision was reached in a moment.

"We've got to get off this trail," he said. "There's a chance that if they keep up the pursuit after dark they'll pass right on, thinking we're still ahead of them. Now we'll make for that gully off at the right. There seems to be no path, but we'll have to make our own. Hustle now!"

It proved to be a tangled wilderness of trees and undergrowth that the fugitives had to traverse, and it was a half hour before they reached the further side of the gully. By this time it was fully dark, and, though this increased the difficulties of the way, the members of the little party blessed it for screening them from observation.

All dismounted and tethered their horses, and then with haste but exceeding care got out their radio sets.

Brandon had been doing some rapid figuring and had reached a fairly accurate idea of their location. The electric line itself, whose course was known to every one in that region, was a valuable factor in his calculations. He dictated these facts to Bob, who, it had been decided, was to do the sending. Bob jotted them down hastily on a leaf from his notebook, while Jimmy held a carefully shaded torch to let him see what he was doing.

But just then their plans received a severe setback by the coming of a thunderstorm, the signs

of which they had failed to notice in their excitement. Claps of thunder rolled through the hills. Jagged streaks of lightning cut across the sky. Almost on the heels of these came the rain—a pitiless, pelting, torrential rain that drenched them through and through.

They did not dare seek shelter under the trees for fear that these might be struck by lightning. They sought what cover they could find under projecting points of rock, but these were hopelessly inadequate.

If it had been simply an ordinary rainstorm, they would have gone on making their connection with the electric wire regardless of mere discomfort. But with lightning playing all about them it would have been flirting with Death to handle the wires, and they were forced to wait until the electrical storm had passed.

The delay chafed every one sorely, for moments were precious now, and all were frantic to get in touch with the outside world before their enemies reached the vicinity.

"This may hold them up though, and force them to seek shelter," murmured Joe, trying to extract what comfort he could from the situation.

"I'm not counting much on that," replied Brandon. "But there's one good thing the storm will do for us. It will wipe out our trail, and they won't see where we turned off from the beaten

path. We can thank it for that much, anyway."

For more than an hour the storm raged before it had spent its fury. Then the rain gradually ceased, the lightning grew less frequent, and the thunder subsided into a low growl and finally died away beyond the mountains.

"Now let's get busy!" cried Bob springing up. "Hand me that wire Joe and—"

He stopped without finishing the sentence for his ear had caught a sound that was not connected with the storm. His companions had heard it also, and stood absolutely mute.

From the trail that they had left came the clatter of horses hoofs and the murmur of guttural voices. As the boys crouched low in the wet underbrush and strained their eyes in the darkness, they could dimly discern shadowy, mounted figures moving along in Indian file. Two of the men carried lighted torches of pine knots, with which they bent down at intervals and scrutinized the trail.

Would they note where the fugitives had turned aside? The boys and Brandon Harvey waited with bated breath for the answer to this question, on which perhaps depended life or death.

But the storm had done its work thoroughly, as Brandon had predicted, and the party passed on. Gradually the sound of hoofs died away.

Not until the last sound had vanished did any of the little party dare speak above a whisper.

It was Harvey who first broke the silence.

"A narrow shave, but a miss is as good as a mile," he remarked. "I guess we can get to work now, but we must be mighty careful. There may be another section of the crowd coming on behind, or for some reason the others may turn back."

They brought out the radio sets and placed them upon a slab of rock within easy reach of the electric cable. Then while the boys made the necessary adjustments Brandon reached up to make connection with the wire. But in his haste he had forgotten to slip on rubber gloves, of which the boys had two pairs in their outfit, and his companions were too feverishly busy to notice the oversight.

There was a startled cry from Bob as the radio man staggered back and fell as though shot. So sudden had been the fall that the boys had no chance to catch him, and he struck the ground with force and lay motionless.

The boys rushed to him and Bob lifted his head to his knee.

"An electric shock!" cried Herb.

"It's killed him!" groaned Jimmy.

"No, it hasn't," declared Joe, who had slipped his hand inside Brandon's shirt. "His heart's

still beating. Here, let's get him in a comfortable position. Loosen the collar of his shirt, Jimmy. Rub his wrists, Herb. He'll come to in a minute."

But it was many minutes before their ministrations had any results, and in the meantime their hearts were heavy with dreadful apprehension.

It seemed as though a ton's weight had been lifted from them when Brandon Harvey at last opened his eyes.

That he recognized them was evident from his expression. He tried to speak, but was too weak.

"Don't try to talk," counseled Bob gently. "Just lie there and take it easy. You've had a bad shock. The wire was chock full of electricity from the thunder storm, and you forgot to put on the gloves. But don't worry. I've got the location jotted down, and I'll get the message through somehow."

In getting the set ready to do some sending the Radio Boys now had to rely entirely on their own efforts. Joe and Bob went at this, leaving Herb and Jimmy to put the receiving set in order. This latter job was easy for the set had inside wires and the extra aerial was merely looped from one tree to another nearby.

Not for nothing had Joe and Bob visited

several of the big sending plants and inspected the outfits. They had asked innumerable questions and even studied the sending problem for weeks. Consequently, even in this out-of-the-way spot, with only crude things to work with, they made rapid progress in getting ready to broadcast.

"It won't be much to look at," grinned Bob grimly. "But if we can reach the outside world, that's all we want."

"Yes, and we want it quick," answered Joe. He grabbed up a pair of pliers. "Wait till I give this connection another twist. "Gee, I hope the water around here doesn't balk us."

"And I hope the juice on the cable is O.K. If it isn't—well, we may blow up, or something worse."

They worked feverishly.

In the meanwhile, the receiving set was made ready and Herb announced he could get Denver and San Francisco.

At last Bob and Joe finished their task. So far no further mishap had occurred. But "cutting in" on a high power cable had proved no easy task.

Watched anxiously by all the others, Bob tested out the sending set and then began to send out his call for assistance.

He gave the location as nearly as he could,

told of the plight of the party menaced by Indians, and urged immediate assistance.

Ten times at two minute intervals, he sent out that urgent call. Then he paused waiting, hoping, oh, so desperately hoping for a reply.

With straining ears they listened in on the receiving set. But no sound rewarded them. For some time longer they waited, and with every passing moment hope died within them. Were all their hopes doomed to failure?

Then suddenly came a voice as though the speaker stood right beside them. It was a crisp, resonant voice like that of one habituated to command.

"The call from the Brandon Harvey party has been heard," came the voice. "The location has been noted. Help will be sent. Men are already in the saddle. You can expect—"

There came a sudden interruption. A shot rang out. Yells filled the air.

The Indians were upon them!

CHAPTER XX

IN DIRE PERIL

THERE was a trampling and crashing through the undergrowth from the direction of the main trail, and other shots came whizzing along in the wake of the first, flattening against the rocks, but going so wide of any human target that it was evident the assailants were firing at random in the darkness. It seemed as though the shots were designed to intimidate rather than kill.

The Radio Boys, who had been bending over the receiving set, sprang to their feet in wild alarm. They had been so absorbed in listening to the message that was coming to them out of the air that for the moment they had forgotten everything else.

Bob was the first to regain his presence of mind.

"Harvey!" he exclaimed. "We must get him out of this! Come along, fellows!"

They rushed to the sheltered place where they

had left their leader, and found him on his feet, but swaying dizzily.

"Down in the gulley!" directed Brandon, trying to steady himself. "It's our only chance!"

He tried to lead the way, but staggered and would have fallen had not Bob and Joe supported him. Each drew one of Brandon's arms over his shoulder, and the whole party scrambled and slid down the slope to the bottom of the gorge.

Above them they could hear the yells of their foes, who had now burst through the undergrowth and were evidently on the spot they had just vacated.

Had Harvey been his usual self, it is possible that they might have made good their escape. But the electric shock, following the mental shock he had had the same day, due to the rattlesnake, had shaken him badly, and his condition seriously handicapped the party.

Still, the darkness was their ally, and they did not abandon hope.

"Keep going, fellows, but don't let's get separated," panted Bob. "We still have a chance."

Points of light flashed out near the top of the slope.

"They're starting a bonfire!" groaned Jimmy. "It'll light up the whole place and give us away, sure!"

"No they're not," said Bob encouragingly.

"The wood's so soaked that it can't burn."

"What are they doing then?" persisted Jimmy.

He had not long to wait for an answer. A blazing pine torch came hurtling through the air, the flame streaming behind it like the flame of a comet. In that light the figures of the fugitives stood out clearly.

The yell that came from above told the whites that they had been seen, and there was a rush of feet down the slope.

"Turn sharp to the right!" gasped Bob, who because of the partial burden of Brandon and his own strenuous endeavors was almost at the limit of his strength.

The strategy availed for a moment, and they could hear the grunts of vexation as the redskins reached the place where the whites had been. But now many torches had been lighted and several were hurled in various directions, revealing once more the hurrying forms, and from every side the pursuers closed in on their game.

Escape was cut off. Bob slipped from under Brandon's arm and raised his rifle; but before he could fire Brandon's voice checked him.

"Don't fire, Bob," he commanded. "It would only infuriate them and do no good. They might kill us all out of hand. They're too many for us. We're caught now, but our time will come."

The next moment they were in the midst of a

wild melée. Sinewy hands grasped them, exulting cries rent the air. They were prisoners!

They were dragged roughly up the slope, prodded when they did not move quickly enough to suit their captors, and finally reached the level space at the top. There they were thrown roughly to the ground and several Indians were detailed to guard them.

There was no attempt to bind their limbs. Bob's rifle had been taken from him and Brandon had been deprived of his revolver. The others had been searched for firearms, but had none. Unarmed and helpless and strongly guarded, it did not seem necessary to their captors to tie them up.

This contributed somewhat to their physical comfort, but had little effect on their mental depression. They were in a desperate plight, and did not attempt to delude themselves.

"Here's a pretty kettle of fish," grumbled Jimmy.

"Up against it good and plenty," gloomed Herb.

"Old Clintonia would look pretty good to me just now." muttered Joe.

"Snap out of it, you fellows!" admonished Bob. "We're far from being dead ones yet."

"Not so far as I'd like," retorted Jimmy. "Look! They've got our horses now," as he

saw the little pintos being led into the clearing.

"And our packs, too," added Herb, as he noted the Indians tearing open the bundles and eagerly taking possession of what they contained.

"Swiping every bit of grub, too!" moaned Jimmy. "And I'm as hungry as a wolf. Do you suppose they'll give us anything to eat?"

Bob ignored the plaintive question as he looked eagerly around.

"What are you looking for?" asked Joe.

"The radio sets," whispered Bob. "Thank goodness they don't seem to have discovered them!"

"A mighty lucky thing, too," said Brandon. "If they had, they might suspect that we'd been calling for help. There are radio sets now on the reservations, and doubtless some of these fellows know well enough what they're used for. Let's hope that they don't come across them. If they don't, they'll move in a leisurely way, thinking they have all the time there is."

The mention of the radio sent a thrill of hope through the captives' veins.

"Men already in the saddle!" murmured Bob, recalling the words of the message. "That sounds mighty good. At this very minute they may be riding toward us."

"Mighty lucky we got in the call before these Indians nabbed us," put in Herb.

"Wonder what place it was we got," pondered Jimmy.

"Search me," returned Bob. "If we'd had a chance to listen a minute longer, we'd have probably found out. But I don't care who got the call so long as he'll send enough men and send them quickly."

"But when they get here they'll probably find us gone," surmised Joe. "We don't know where this bunch will take us. We may be a hundred miles from here in a day or two."

"They'd probably be able to find our trail," put in Brandon, whose mind was now rapidly regaining its accustomed clearness. "But all the same, it will be good for us to juggle for time if we can. I think they'll probably camp here for the night, anyway. And all through the night those men in the saddle will be riding our way."

It was a comforting thought and did much to calm the ferment of the captives' minds, and they were further relieved when it was made clear that their captors did not mean to starve them. A supply of beans was brought to them, together with a can that contained a sort of stew, savory enough but of unknown ingredients.

The boys looked at this and smelled of it rather suspiciously.

"I've heard that Indians were fond of stewed dog," remarked Herb dubiously.

"What of it?" asked Jimmy. "You can't scare me off that way. I'm hungry enough to eat anything. If you fellows don't want it, I'll take your share."

The other boys conquered their prejudices sufficiently to taste it, and, finding it good, asked no further questions. Brandon Harvey, older and knowing more of the world, ate and enjoyed unquestioningly what was set before him.

The Indians came and went freely, looking at their prisoners curiously, sometimes scowlingly, but offering no injury. Three of the band, however, held aloof. One was the chief, and the other two were evidently in his confidence, for the three conversed earnestly together.

"Planning what they'll do with us," murmured Jimmy uneasily.

"I suppose so," answered Bob. "Say, fellows, don't you notice something queer about those two fellows hobnobbing with the chief? Seems to me—"

He was interrupted by an Indian who came to them with a surly command.

"Come!" he ordered. "Chief wants you."

CHAPTER XXI

LIFE OR DEATH

THE prisoners rose and followed the man into the presence of the chief.

As they drew near, the two men who had been in conference with him withdrew and betook themselves to the outside of the throng that squatted on the ground, intent on seeing how their chief would deal with the captives in his power.

The chief, the same stalwart Indian who had surprised Joe and Jimmy in the tunnel, sat on a stump on the further side of the fire. He looked frowningly on his prisoners as they ranged themselves before him.

For a full minute he did not speak. Then he fixed his gaze on Brandon Harvey.

"Why you come into Gold Valley?" the chief asked abruptly.

"Because I had a right to come," answered Brandon composedly.

"You were told to stay away," continued the chief menacingly.

"How do you know?" countered Brandon.

The question seemed to take the chief unawares, and for a moment he seemed confused. Then he recovered his usual composure.

"It is for me to ask questions and you to answer them," he said coldly. "And if you do not answer them, I can find ways to make you."

Harvey had no doubt of that as he looked around at the dark faces grouped about the campfire. The savage strain of their ancestors was still in them, and those ancestors had been adepts in the art of "making men speak." His shrewdness told him that he had nothing to gain by antagonizing his inquisitor.

"Very well, go ahead," he said quietly. "There is none of your questions I am not ready to answer."

"The white man has seen wisdom," said the chief, with the least suggestion of a sneer. "You were told to keep away from Gold Valley."

"I was told what was not true," answered Brandon. "I was told that there was disease among the cattle. I was told that there was smallpox among your people. The man who told me this spoke with a forked tongue. There is no disease. There is no smallpox. I do not know why these things were told to me, but I can guess."

"The white man can see now that it would

have been wise for him to do as he was told," said the chief curtly.

"There was no reason why I should not come," returned Brandon. The place is free to all people. It is not like the reservations which are kept for the Indians and where the Great White Father at Washington says that the Indians must stay."

This was said innocently enough, but that it went home was evident from the uneasy stir that went around the circle of listeners.

"Besides," went on the radio man, "I own a mine in Gold Valley, and I came to see it, so that I could know whether it was good or bad."

"It is bad," interrupted the chief. "There is no gold in it. It is only a hole in the ground. It is no good to the white man."

"But there were many men working in it yesterday," returned Brandon. "Men do not work so hard just to dig a hole in the ground. But even if it is only a hole in the ground, it is mine."

The scowl on the chief's face grew fiercer.

"It is not the white man's mine," he declared. "Our fathers owned it. The white men got it from them by cheating and lying. It is our mine. But I will not trade words with the white man who has a cunning tongue. I will tell you what you must do. You must go away from Gold Valley and never come back."

"But if I did go away, the mine would still belong to me," said Brandon. "I could send men, many men, who would take the mine and work it for me."

"The white man must do more than go away from Gold Valley," replied the chief. "He must make papers that give the mine to the Indians and send back the papers to me. He must promise to do that. If he does, he can go free."

"But how do you know I would keep that promise?" asked Brandon.

"You would keep it," replied the chief with assurance, "because I would hold here one of these boys until you did send back the papers. And if you did not do this, that boy should die."

Brandon Harvey gave an involuntary start. There was a sinister ring to the words that told him the chief would have no hesitation in keeping his threat.

"You would kill him?" he exclaimed.

"I have spoken," said the chief calmly.

"If you did that, the soldiers of the Great White Father would come and wipe you out," said Brandon.

"Maybe," admitted the chief. "But the boy would be dead."

He had the whip hand, and he knew it. Harvey knew it. He would of course have sacrificed a thousand mines rather than have one of his

young companions endangered. But he played for time.

"Suppose that I did not make this promise?"

"Then you will all be dead by to-morrow night."

So matter of fact was the chief's statement that his hearers had no doubt that he meant exactly what he said. A cold shiver ran down the captives' spines.

Brandon Harvey pretended to be thinking deeply.

"There is much in what the chief has said," he said at last slowly, "and I will think of his words through the dark hours of the night. In the morning I will tell what I will do."

Gratified at the impression he had made, the chief offered no objection to this. Although, if no alternative offered, he was ready to go to any length, he much preferred that there should be no killing if his end could be achieved without it. In the depths of his heart he had a wholesome respect for the long arm of the United States Government, and had no desire to bring its wrath down upon him.

"It is well," he said, rising from his seat as a sign that the conference was ended. "The white man is no fool. He will see that it is best to do as I say. Take them away and watch over them

through the night," he directed his guards. "If they escape, you die."

The whites were hustled away roughly to a spot on the outskirts of the camp. Pine torches, fastened to the trees, furnished sufficient light for them to be constantly in sight of their guards, of whom there were five, all armed with rifles.

"Looks as if they had us on the hip," murmured Bob, as the members of the party huddled close together for companionship as well as for warmth, for the air was raw and damp, and they had no blankets.

"Looks that way, for a fact," conceded Brandon Harvey. "Which one of you boys shall I leave as a hostage?" he asked, with a whimsical smile. "Wonder what that fellow thinks I am, anyway!"

"But, after all, I don't see what else you can do," said Joe soberly. "We seem to be between the devil and the deep sea. It's either a matter of our being all killed or one of us taking our chance in staying."

"There may be some other way out," returned Harvey, creasing his brow in thought. "In the first place, we've gained time. There are a good many hours before morning, and by that time help may have reached us. Don't forget, boys, that men are coming, that even now their horses' hoofs are clattering along the trail."

"But suppose they don't get here before you have to give your answer in the morning?" persisted Joe. "We can't go on evading much longer. That chief is a crafty codger."

"Too crafty by half," put in Jimmy. "That stuff about the legal papers! He knows too much for an Indian!"

"Oh, he's only a mouthpiece," asserted Brandon. "There are crafty white brains behind all this. He's only a puppet that moves when other men pull the strings."

"And I guess there is no doubt who those men are," remarked Joe.

"Grimshaw and Staley, of course," returned Brandon. "Together, perhaps, with some confederates that we haven't met as yet," he added. "They're the prime movers in all this villainy. The Indians are simply doing as they are told because they've been promised a share in the profits. They're the goats, and of course the whites will cheat them out of their eye teeth as soon as they get rid of us. Oh, if I could get my hands on them! If Grimshaw and Staley were only here!"

"They are here!" said Bob calmly.

CHAPTER XXII

THE GRIZZLY ENTERS

A BOMBSHELL dropping among them could scarcely have startled his hearers more than Bob's declaration. They looked at him as though he had taken leave of his senses.

"What do you mean?" asked Brandon Harvey incredulously.

"Just what I say," returned Bob.

"How do you know?" queried Joe.

"Because I've seen them," Bob replied. "That is, I've seen Staley and another white man who, I take for granted, is Grimshaw. Listen! Did you notice those two fellows that were talking so earnestly with the chief just before they dragged us out there?"

"I saw them," put in Herb. "But they were Indians."

"Looked like Indians," corrected Bob. "But that was just camouflage. Something about them struck me as queer, and I studied them more closely. They didn't move like Indians. They

didn't talk like Indians. Instead of deferring to the chief, they were bossing him, telling him what to do. When the light fell on the face of one of them, I recognized Staley. I could see, too, that the other fellow had the features of a white man. They had reddened their faces and wore moccasins and the same kind of clothes as the Indians. But that was just bluff. And you'll remember, perhaps, that when we came up near the fire they hurried off to the outskirts of the crowd. They didn't want us to see them at close range."

"By Jove, I believe you're right!" exclaimed Brandon. "Bob, I have to hand it to you! You've got the eyes of a hawk!"

"And a mighty slick headpiece behind the eyes," put in Joe enthusiastically.

"That may simplify matters," said Brandon thoughtfully. "As long as they could stay in the background they might be perfectly willing to let their tools go to any extremes, even killing, if it would suit their purposes. But they might hesitate at wholesale murder if they were known to be the instigators. They know better than the Indians the power that lies behind the machinery of the law. At any rate, it's given us a card in the game that may turn out to be a trump. I imagine there may be a little consternation on their part when I unmask them in the morning."

In the meantime, there seemed to be a good deal of hilarity in the main camp a little way off. Part of this, no doubt, was due to their success in capturing their quarry. But that some of it was artificial and caused by liquor of which in some manner they had become possessed, was evident by the increasing noise and boisterousness that grew ever more pronounced as the time passed on.

"Celebrating their luck in nabbing us," muttered Jimmy lugubriously.

"I wish there were arsenic in it!" snapped Joe vindictively.

"No such luck," murmured Herb disconsolately.

Every little while the guards would look longingly toward the scene of festivities, as though they wished they were able to take part in it. There was much complaining and growling at the hard fate that had placed them on sentry duty.

Finally, after many whispered conferences, one of them slipped off in the direction of the main body. In the befuddled state of the participants in the revels it was apparently not difficult for him to get what he wanted, for in a little while he was back with a bottle.

This was passed surreptitiously from hand to hand, and each indulged himself at intervals,

watching sharply the while lest any one should come from the main body and detect them. But no such interruption occurred, and in a little while the bottle was empty.

The whites had watched this proceeding eagerly, in the hope that it might help relax the vigilance of the sentries. But there had been just enough drunk to dull the perception of their guards, but by no means enough to stupefy them. Occasionally they seemed to be inclined to repeat the experiment, but enough discretion still obtained to make them refrain. They knew what an accounting would be demanded of them if their prisoners were missing in the morning.

"Another hope gone ge-flooey!" growled Joe.

"Lady Luck is sore at us," grumbled Herb.

"Anything may happen before morning," declared Bob encouragingly. "I'm listening for the clatter of hoofs."

He did hear something a little while later, but it was not the clatter of hoofs.

The main camp had settled down to drunken slumber. The sentries were tired and sleepy, but still kept their eyes open and lounged about in the perfunctory discharge of their duty. The captives, despite the apprehension at their hearts, were drowsing and nodding. At intervals they roused themselves and looked about. And it was at one of these times that Bob heard the sound.

It was at first a distant crackling, as though some heavy object were forcing its way through the bushes. Then he became conscious of a padding sound, something like that made by the moccasined foot of an Indian. But no moccasin ever trod so heavily.

He was fully awake now. He glanced at the sentries. Their heavy-lidded eyes betrayed no consciousness of having heard anything. The drink had dulled the keenness of their senses.

The padding still continued, and then Bob saw a slight movement in the bushes on the other side of the little clearing. A moment later the bushes were pushed aside and a huge grizzly bear lumbered into the open space!

Probably the noise of the revelry had in the first place attracted the beast's notice and the smell of food had lured on his appetite. Here was a welcome chance to vary his diet of nuts and berries, a chance he must not overlook.

It was likely that he had no pugnacious intentions, though ready then as at any time to accept any challenge that might be thrown down.

One of the sentries caught sight of the animal and uttered a yell of alarm. Hastily raising his rifle, he fired.

But the bullet only grazed the bear's shoulder, inflicting a trifling injury. It was enough, however, to raise the rage of the brute, and with

a hideous growl it rushed toward its enemy.

The latter threw aside his rifle and sped toward the main camp, followed by his companions, who, stricken with panic, dropped their weapons as they ran.

On they went, the bear gaining on them, and burst into the midst of the sleeping camp.

In an instant there was pandemonium. Shouts of surprise and terror rose, as the Indians, befuddled by their revels, ran for cover from the dreaded monster that now was raging through the camp.

Bob and his companions had sprung to their feet.

"Our chance!" cried Bob. "They've forgotten all about us for the time! Here's where we make our getaway! Grab those rifles and come!"

No sooner said than done. In a moment the captives had possessed themselves of the abandoned weapons. Then the underbrush swallowed them up.

CHAPTER XXIII

STANDING AT BAY

THE transition from despair to hope, from captivity to freedom, had been so sudden that the heads of the Radio Boys, and even of their older companion, were whirling and they scarcely sensed whether they were moving in reality or in a dream.

They had no idea of the direction they were taking. They had simply plunged into the bushes at the nearest point. They did not know whether they were headed east, west, north or south. For that matter, they did not care. One road might as well lead to safety as another. The only thing that mattered now was to get away from that spot as soon as possible.

Behind them the tumult continued, and there were occasional shots that told of a battle going on.

For a long time they plunged blindly onward in almost impenetrable darkness. Much of the way they had to force themselves through the

thick underbrush. Again they would come to glades where the traveling was easier. Sometimes they reached a sandy or rocky plateau, and here they made good time.

Not until they had progressed so far that every sound from the camp had died away did they stop to get their breath and confer on their future movements.

"We're safe for the time now," said Brandon Harvey, with a sigh of relief, as he wiped the perspiration from his face. "They've been so busy with the bear that probably the thought of us hasn't yet occurred to them, and when it does they won't have the least idea of the direction in which we've gone."

"Maybe they'll give up the idea of following us altogether," suggested Jimmy hopefully.

The owner of the mine shook his head.

"We mustn't fool ourselves that way," he said. "They'll be more desperate now than ever. We know too much. With their threats of robbery and killing, they know that we have evidence enough to put the whole bunch in jail. Oh, they'll follow us, all right. But catching us may be a very different matter."

"And before they do, that promised help may come," suggested Joe. "We're in vastly better fix than we were an hour ago."

"Not to say that we've got weapons," exulted

Bob. "There's a rifle apiece for us, and just before we scooted I picked up a cartridge belt that one of the Indians had laid aside. We ought to be able to put up a very pretty fight, if it comes to fighting."

Only for a few minutes did the fugitives permit themselves to rest. Then they started on again. Weary as they were, the thought of liberty was a stimulant that put new strength into tired nerves and muscles.

When they came to rocky places they turned occasionally at an angle to the direction they had been pursuing so as to throw their pursuers off the track. Footprints left trails on stones that only a bloodhound could follow.

"I think," said Brandon, as they hurried along, "that while one way may be as good as another, we ought in general to climb rather than descend. If they should catch up with us, we'd have an advantage by being higher up. They'd have to climb to get to us and we could defend ourselves more easily."

"Good idea," said Bob, and was echoed by the others.

All through that weary night they tramped on, listening all the time for sounds that might indicate pursuit. But nothing save the usual nocturnal sounds broke the silence.

Gradually it grew lighter, and when the dawn

had fully come they found themselves on a broad plateau high in the mountains. From this they scanned the surrounding country. As far as they could see there were no figures moving anywhere.

All the members of the party threw themselves flat on the ground. It seemed to them that they had reached the limit of their endurance. Their feet were blistered from the rough traveling, their limbs and faces were scratched and bruised by contact with thorns and stumps and rocks. For the last hour they had seemed to be journeying in a nightmare.

"I'm all in," groaned Jimmy.

"My feet weigh a ton apiece," asseverated Herb.

"Can't go another yard," declared Joe.

"A tough job, but it was worth it," affirmed Bob.

Brandon Harvey said nothing. His eyes had been searching the side of the cliff that rose from the plateau.

"It's too open here," he stated. "If they should come upon us, they could surround us on every side. We must get up among those rocks. Probably we can find shelter behind them, and if they climbed up to us they'd have to come one or two at a time. That'll give us an advantage that may offset their numbers.

The good sense of this was evident, and although every step was torture, they painfully made their way up the mountainside until they found a place that would command the path and at the same time afford places of shelter behind the numerous rocks.

Here they disburdened themselves of their rifles and stretched themselves out at full length.

They were very hungry, but had no food except a cake of chocolate and a couple of sandwiches that Jimmy carried in his pockets. This meagre supply they divided equally among them and, little as it was, it did something to assuage the gnawings of hunger.

"Oh, for some more of that dog stew!" sighed Jimmy.

"Go to sleep and forget it," counseled Herb unfeelingly.

For two nights in succession they had gone almost wholly without sleep, and now their eyes closed in spite of themselves.

"We'll stand guard in hour watches," said Brandon. "I'll keep watch and call one of you in an hour. Now go to sleep."

The injunction was unnecessary, for the boys were in the land of dreams almost before he had finished speaking.

Joe was the first one called to take the next watch. Then came Herb and Jimmy in succes-

sion. The report of each was the same. Nothing had been seen to cause uneasiness.

Bob's turn came last. He had had four hours of uninterrupted sleep and felt greatly refreshened. He was cheered, too, at the news that there had been no sign of the enemy.

But his elation was of short duration. Fifteen minutes of his watch had not passed before his eyes descried a number of mounted figures in the distance coming in his direction.

At times the band would pause, as if deciphering the trail. But they invariably found it by that species of wood and prairie craft of which the red man is the master. Then the journey would be resumed, always in the right direction, and the figures loomed up larger and larger, coming toward the hiding place of the fugitives like an implacable fate.

Bob woke his comrades.

"They're coming," he announced grimly, as they gazed at him sleepily. "I think we're in for a fight!"

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BUGLE SOUNDS

SLEEP was banished at once from the eyes of the beleaguered ones by this ominous announcement.

With the utmost expedition they looked to their rifles. They were in no shape for any extended conflict, for the cartridges that Bob had snatched up in his flight were only sufficient for four rounds apiece, not many, even with those already in the magazines.

Peering through the crevices of the rocks behind which they were sheltered, they could see that their enemies were still coming steadily in their direction and were now so near that their features could be distinguished.

Three men rode at the head, the chief in the center.

"Take your glasses, Mr. Harvey, and look at those fellows on either side of the chief," said Bob. "See if they're not Grimshaw and Staley.'

Brandon looked hard and long.

"Right you are, Bob," he said, as he put up his glasses. "The coloring can't disguise their white features. They're the real scoundrels of this whole affair. The Indians are simply doing as they are told."

In a few minutes the party reached the level space at the foot of the cliffs and dismounted. Some of them circled round like hounds on a scent, trying to trace the direction in which the fugitives had gone.

There was a guttural grunt and an exclamation from one of the Indians, and immediately the eyes of the whole party were directed toward the cliff.

"They're onto us!" groaned Jimmy, as he noted the movement.

An excited conference was going on below, various members of the group talking and gesticulating as they pointed out the rough path up which the whites had climbed.

The majority seemed in favor of immediate action. But the chief and his two white companions appeared to be counseling caution. They knew that the rifles of the sentries were missing, and naturally concluded that the fugitives had taken them with them. And they knew that with even ordinary luck the whites, in their strong natural position, could take considerable toll of

their assailants before they were overwhelmed by sheer force of numbers.

Finally the chief himself, waving a white rag, came to the foot of the cliff.

"White man!" he called, "I want to make talk."

There was no reply from the owner of the mine.

"White man!" the chief called again, this time with a trace of impatience in his tone, "I know you are there. Come on and we will talk."

Again no reply. The boys crouched still more closely behind the rocks. But Jimmy, in trying to make his rotund self as small as possible, slipped in the effort and one leg projected beyond the rock. He drew it in again swiftly, but the mischief was done.

A shout went up from the watchers below, and a saturnine smile came over the countenance of the chief.

"Now will you talk, white man?" he called. "You are there, and I know it."

Further silence would serve no purpose, and Brandon Harvey spoke, though without showing himself. For all he knew, Staley and Grimshaw were only waiting to pick him off.

"What do you want to say?" he called out.

The chief hesitated for a moment.

"You cannot get away from here," he said. "You are few. We are many. We do not want

to kill you. If you come down, we will not harm you."

"You said before that you were going to kill us by to-night if I did not give up the mine," replied Brandon. "Were you telling the truth then, or are you telling the truth now?"

"There is no need of killing if you will do as I say," returned the chief.

"What *you* say!" repeated Brandon, hazarding a bold stroke. "What Grimshaw and Staley say, you mean. Tell those renegades to come here and talk to me."

The consternation caused by this remark could be seen by the look that came into the countenance of the chief, as well as by the way the rascals in question took pains to efface themselves among the crowd of redskins. They had had no idea that their identity had been suspected, and the one thing farthest from their wishes was to figure in any subsequent court proceedings that might land them in jail.

Brandon could not see the expressions, but he knew by the disconcerted silence of the chief that the shot had gone home.

But after a moment the latter recovered his self-possession.

"This is a strange talk," he said haughtily. "I do not know what you mean. There is no one here but my own people."

"You speak with a forked tongue," replied Brandon. "I know they are there. You can tell them this: If you and they go away and leave us in peace, if you also leave Gold Valley and drop work in my mine, I will forget all that you and they have done against me. But if not, they will get all that is coming to them and so will you, as sure as there is a Government in Washington."

Again there was a brief silence. The boldness of the man who, with his companions, seemed hopelessly trapped, the way in which he dictated terms instead of submitting to them, seemed to bewilder and daunt the chief. Was the party stronger than it seemed? Had it perhaps been reinforced?

The chief walked slowly back and held a conference with some of his companions that lasted for several minutes.

"You handed him one that time, Mr. Harvey," whispered Bob.

"Hot off the bat," put in Joe. "Do you think it will work?"

"A bare chance; but I'm not too confident," returned Brandon.

"He's coming back," announced Herb, peering through a crevice of the rocks.

The chief's bearing now was truculent and determined.

"I do no more talking," he called. "White man and boys must come down."

"And if we don't?" called back Brandon.

"Then we will come up and kill you all," declared the Indian.

Bob, during this brief exchange, had started violently. Then he had put his ear to the ground.

He lifted his head and grabbed Brandon's arm.

"Stall him! Keep him talking! Play for time! I hear something! Sounds like hoofs! Play for time!"

The owner of the mine caught his meaning. In a voice strangely humble and submissive he replied to the chief:

"I have heard what the chief has said. Perhaps there is wisdom in his words. We are few and you are many. It is not well that any one should be killed. But I must talk to my friends and see what they will say. Then I will tell you what we will do."

A look of satisfaction came into the stolid face of the Indian. His threat had had quicker results than he had expected.

"It is well," he replied. "If your friends are wise, they will feel as you do. I will wait. But do not be long."

He stood like a statue at the foot of the cliff.

Brandon turned eagerly to Bob.

"What did you mean, Bob?" he asked. "Tell me! Quick!"

"They're coming!" whispered Bob exultantly. "They're coming! Riding hard! Put your ear to the ground. Coming nearer and nearer! Oh, if they don't miss us!"

All of the party now had their ears against the ground. There it was. No doubt about it. The rat-a-tat-tat of hoofs! Louder and louder!

"Get your rifles ready," commanded Brandon. "We must signal them to tell them where we are. When I give the word, fire in the air."

"What does the white man say?" came impatiently from the chief.

"This!" cried Brandon.

Five rifles cracked in unison.

The chief jumped. His followers, thinking the volley was aimed at them, rushed to cover.

A bugle sounded, and then, tearing round the side of the cliff, came a squadron of United States cavalry, their weapons gleaming in the sun, their horses' hoofs beating a thunderous tattoo on the rocky ground of the plateau!

CHAPTER XXV

IN THE NICK OF TIME

A WILD hurrah burst from the lips of Brandon Harvey and the Radio Boys as the troops swung round the curve.

But there was no hurrah from the discomfited scoundrels who saw their nefarious plans brought to nought. For a moment they were palsied with fear. Then, with mad shouts of panic, they made for their horses.

There was not the slightest thought of resistance against those grim, seasoned troopers. Both Indians and renegade whites knew too well what that would mean. All they thought of was escape.

But there was no escape. The leader of the troop barked out a sharp command, and immediately his men swooped down upon the rascals, surrounding them, cutting off their flight, penning them in a huddled mass in the center of the plateau.

Another curt command and the prisoners were

disarmed. Then, while most of the soldiers swung easily in their saddles, ready to thwart the least break for liberty, the leader of the squadron dismounted and came to meet the Radio Boys and their companion, who were scrambling down from their rocky refuge.

"I am Captain Prescott from the military post south of us," announced the commander. "You, I take it, are the party who sent us that radio call for help."

"That's right, Captain," replied Brandon Harvey as he grasped the outstretched hand. "And we're your eternal debtors for coming to our aid. My name is Brandon Harvey, and these are young friends of mine," and he then introduced his companions by name.

The captain, a fine, upstanding, military figure, acknowledged the introduction with a genial smile.

"Judging from the looks of things, we didn't get here any too soon," he remarked, as he looked at the sullen bunch of captives.

"Just when we needed you most," replied Brandon. "Those fellows had just issued their ultimatum to come down or get killed when we heard the clatter of your horses' hoofs. I tell you I never heard sweeter music."

The officer smiled.

"It was I who caught your message, and my

men got busy at once," he explained. "I asked you for a little more explicit direction as to where you were, but got no answer."

"For a very good reason," replied Brandon. "The Indians came upon us at that moment, and we had to scatter. But it was great luck that we got our call to you before they came."

"Well, I'm mighty glad we got here," returned the officer. "And now tell me what it's all about."

They sat down upon convenient rocks, and Brandon Harvey recounted the story of their adventures. Captain Prescott listened with the greatest attention and sympathy.

"You've certainly had a rough deal," he said, when the owner of the mine had finished. "Bring the leader of that gang here," he ordered one of his men.

The order was promptly obeyed. The chief stood sullenly before him while the captain eyed him sternly.

"So you're the ringleader of that bunch, White Hawk," he said. "I might know that where there was any trouble you'd be in the thick of it. You know that you have been forbidden to leave the reservation. But you slipped off just the same and took a bunch of your fellows with you. I can see where you're in for a tough time when I hand you over to the reservation authorities."

Brandon had not yet spoken of the presence of the white men with the Indians, and now he rectified the omission.

"Beg pardon, Captain Prescott," he said. "This fellow is bad enough, no doubt, and I hope he gets all that's coming to him. But the real instigators of this plot are in that bunch over there," and he pointed to the crowd of prisoners. "They're white men, and their names are Guy Grimshaw and Henry Staley."

The captain was taken aback.

"The rascals!" he exclaimed. "Can you point them out?"

Brandon indicated the men, who were hiding as far as they could behind the Indians, and the captain sent a couple of his men to bring the culprits before him.

They were hustled into his presence. Their disguise was clever enough, and probably only eyes as sharp as Bob's would have been able to detect them, mixed in as they were with the Indians. Now, however, on close scrutiny, it could be seen that their features were not those of redskins.

The game was up and the rascals knew it.

"All right," snarled one. "I'm Staley. And this is Grimshaw. Now what are you going to do about it? You can't hang anything on us."

"Nothing but outlawry and theft and a few

more things," responded the captain sarcastically.

"And attempted murder," added Brandon, taking off his sombrero and pointing to the hole in the crown. "A little memento of the gentle Mr. Staley's rifle. Oh, I guess we'll be able to hang several things on you."

"The courts will attend to their cases and put them where they won't do any more mischief for several years to come," predicted the captain.

"Take them away and keep strict guard over them," he ordered.

"And now," continued the captain, with a twinkle in his eye, "I judge a few rations won't come amiss. How about it?"

There was a chorus of eager assents, and Jimmy's voice led all the rest.

The heartiest of meals was forthwith provided, and the boys did it full justice. And while they were eating, the captain and Brandon Harvey discussed their plan of procedure.

"I'll take this gang over to the military post," stated the captain, "and hand them over to the proper authorities. You will be notified when your testimony is needed. Then I'll give you an escort of half a dozen men, who will see you back to Gold Valley and stay with you there until things are settled. If there are any more Indians there, they'll rout them out and take

them to the reservation. I guess you won't be bothered any further, now that we've got the ringleaders."

Harvey and the Radio Boys were profuse in their thanks.

"And those radio sets of ours!" put in Bob eagerly. "I'm crazy to get hold of them again. They probably saved our lives."

"I think likely they did," replied the smiling captain. "There'll be no trouble about that. We'll go around that way and pick them up."

After a few hours rest, the party started on its journey. They reached the spot where the electric line crossed the chasm, and the boys were delighted beyond measure to find the sets safe and sound. The Indians had not discovered them. The boys fondled and caressed the sets as though they were animate things.

"Score one more for good old radio!" ejaculated Bob.

"Nothing like it in all the world!" affirmed Joe.

At this point, with fervent expressions of gratitude and friendship, the party separated, the captain with his prisoners taking the road to the military post, while Brandon and the Radio Boys, with the promised escort of half a dozen troopers, made their way back to Gold Valley.

A few more of the Indians were found and put under guard.

Then followed some busy weeks for Brandon Harvey and the Radio Boys. Samples of the ore were sent to an assay office, and the report came back that they were rich with gold. Experts whom Brandon later brought to the mine confirmed his hope of its value. Men and machinery were secured, and in a little while the mine was a buzzing hive of industry.

All too soon the time of the boys' stay drew to its end. They would have liked to stay there indefinitely, but the call of school duties could not be ignored. But before they went back to the East they were summoned to the neighboring county seat to give evidence against Grimshaw, Staley and the Indians. The red men were let off with light punishment. But the case against Grimshaw and Staley for conspiracy and other offenses was clearly proved, and they were sentenced to long terms in prison.

Brandon's responsibilities made it impossible for him to leave Gold Valley for a long time, but he softened the Radio Boys' regret at leave taking by promising to make them a visit at Clintonia during the next winter.

It was hard for them to leave him and quite as hard for him to say good-bye, for the experiences through which they had gone had cemented

still more strongly the tie that since the days at Ocean Point had bound them together.

The Radio Boys' journey eastward was pleasant though uneventful, and they received a heart-warming welcome when they reached their homes in Clintonia, where the story of their stirring adventures had preceded them.

There the best of news awaited them. Agnes Fennington, they learned, had found her bank-book and her money and was jubilant, and Jesse Farmer was in the seventh heaven of delight.

The crippled boy had solved his problem and was on the high road to fortune. His new microphone had created a sensation in the radio world. Eminent experts had agreed that his invention had marked a great advance in the wonderful science. He had taken out his patent, had made advantageous arrangements for its manufacture, and the demand already had outrun the facilities for supply.

But better even than this was the marked improvement that had taken place in his health. He was no longer the same boy. There was brightness in his eyes and color in his cheeks, and his crippled condition had notably improved under Dr. Atwood's skilful ministrations. There was no longer any doubt that the final operation to which he was looking forward would affect a permanent cure.

"And I have plenty of money for it, my own money!" cried Jesse joyfully. "Oh, what I owe to you boys and your folks!" and here his voice broke and he could go no further, while the eyes of his hearers were also moist.

Not long afterward the operation took place and was a perfect success. Jesse could walk and run like other boys of his age.

"The day that truck crashed into the bus," he was wont to declare, "was the luckiest day of my life."

Some weeks after school had opened the Radio Boys received a joint package from Brandon Harvey. They opened it eagerly. Inside was another parcel inscribed:

"To the Radio Boys, the pluckiest boys I know."

In the heart of the parcel were four shining nuggets of purest gold, to be worn as watch charms.

"The first run of the mine," ran part of the letter that accompanied the gifts. "Mere trifles compared to what you're going to get when I come home from Gold Valley."

THE END

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